

Berk to Burgess

by Quiet-garden

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Summary: How to Train your dragon/ Rise of the Guardians Crossover. Jokul Frosti of the Nordic mythology has come to cause mischief on Berk after centuries of isolation. Hiccup and his new friend "Jack" wreak havoc upon Berk and teach each other a thing or two about fun and responsibility. (Friendship. Jack and Hiccup... "Jackup".) I'm also sorry for the title, I know it's lame.

1. Chapter 1: A nip and a half

Darkness. The first thing I could remember. It was dark... and it was cold. I was scared.

Then...then I saw the Moon. It was so big, so bright... It seemed to, chase the darkness away. And when it did... I wasn't scared any more.

Why I was there and what I was meant to do... Was the only thing I could remember at that time, and it really made me hate the fact I was a Viking at that precise moment.

Let's just step back a second.

The yaks had broken out of their pens during a particularly strong gust of devastating winter's premium grade shrieking wind and it was left up to me to round them up before they became yak-sicles.

Of course, there is the minor fact that I have as much personal insulation as a toothpick, plus furs tend to get in the way when you're flying in a ninety mile-per-hour crosswind on the back of a reptile in the middle of a blizzard, so you could guess that I was probably not the guy for the job. But I did have to try, or else Gobber wouldn't be the only one leaving the great hall in the spring with missing limbs, so Dad sent me out with some spit and a prayer to try and retrieve our livestock.

"C'mon bud, the faster we get them, the faster we can get ourselves some roasted haddock." I whispered to a reluctant dragon, urging him further into the blizzard. Toothless let out a few shots into the flurries to shed some light, but the frost giants seemed to be having a badminton match over Berk that day.

The problem with having a cool prosthetic augmentation is that even though the metal parts of your body are much stronger than the rest of you, they are susceptible to rust, loose screws and freezing over. I'd not seen the low hanging cumulus before plunging us head first into it, causing Toothless' fin to jam and my stirrup to fuse to my "foot".

"Toothless, Pull up! Just a little further pal, we need a landing spot-"

This excursion kept getting better when we began to plummet into the pitch blackness of the previously visible frozen wasteland: Time to kiss my right leg goodbye, or more likely my useless butt.

"NonoNONONO-" Blackness. Ice. Fear. All of these things seemed to wrestle in my brain until a sudden jolt caused everything to silence.

A sharp, icy pinch on my nose brought me back to the world of the living while simultaneously introducing me to a world of hurt. Everything was dark, I ached everywhere and breathing seemed hard, like gargling nails in my oesophagus hard. I felt a leathery wing underneath my hands and the sudden tug below as Toothless turned to nudge me into action with his face. It wasn't happening since quite a lot of my pieces were rattling about inside, so to speak.

"Thor Smite you, Jokul Frosti..." I managed to choke out and even to me it sounded corny, non threatening and fairly bad as the last sentence I'd speak. To be honest though, the last words most Vikings had were along the lines of "Call that Disembowelment-?" and "AARRGGHH."

"Your cruddy piloting skills are_ not_ my fault, little man." Another voice? Surely I was hallucinating unless Toothless had recently learned to jibe.

I cracked open my eyes a fraction and was almost blinded by the bright glare of the uncharacteristically large (and visible) moon. It looked fuzzy around the edges for some reason, but then I realised it was my eyes causing the problem.

A deathly pale hand suddenly reached down and pinched my nose again. Tears stung my eyes and forced me to blink a few more times. It was then that I saw that the moon was a normal size, but a head of snowy hair had caught its light, refracting right into my line of vision.

"Hey, I haven't got all night: Get up." The guy went for a third squeeze but I batted his hand away, anger giving me strength.

"Stop that crud right now, snow cone. What's the big idea?" I forced myself to rise to my bruised elbows, fixing a glare on this idiot. "Seriously, this is how you treat a guy who's been in a major

aeronautical accident? You assault his face?" I rocked forward onto my hands and knees while the stranger did nothing from what I could make out through the sudden waves of dizziness.

"Like there isn't enough wrong with it..." I churned out through gritted teeth, pushing with all I had to rise slowly to my feet. "Really, you must have a problem?"

When the spots stopped dancing I looked down at the perching pin head. He was actually leaning on Toothless, absently scratching behind his ears, observing me with a calm but unmistakable superiority. Toothless looked happy as pie, purring away as the stranger stood smoothly and swung what looked like a battered herding crook over his shoulder.

"Hm. It seems like even though I might have a problem, you have one less," He tapped my ankle with the base of his crook. "You can stand at least."

A sudden blankness washed over my brain while I slowly gave myself a once over. He was right (of course) and I seemed to be OK for the present, nothing seemed broken or even sprained. How that had happened I'll never know. I also noticed a fur cloak had been pinned to my vest and my helmet rested in the snow near my feet.

"So I can. I wonder how that happened..." I said carefully, taking my time to examine the (_really strange_) stranger.

The boy was probably a little older and possible a few inches taller than me, with a certainty that he was much colder than I was. His skin was almost blue, his bare feet and fingers were definitely purple. Although his fashion sense was a little foreign, it wasn't too outrageous with a pair of beaten brown breeches and a woven white tunic. A Leather cloak hung heavily around his skinny shoulders and shone with something silvery. I stumbled forward slightly to get a better look; The kid didn't seem to care.

Like I said, his hair was white, not blonde, _white_. I'd never seen anyone with all their teeth with hair like that, and this guy certainly had teeth, like little pearly bricks. His lips were chilled purple like his feet and his eyes were like blocks of cave ice. Where had this freak come from? He didn't look like he was from here and something about him didn't feel right, like he wasn't quite...

My right knee decided to take a break and like a flash the boy grabbed my arm to catch me. That was when I really felt it, like someone had just dropped a glacier down my spine.

I looked one more time and saw that the silver on his cloak was actually ice; there were snowflakes on his eyebrows, his fingernails had blackened and frost sparkled softly on his face and hair.

He quickly let go and I saw the blue indents in my arm fade back to white. I straightened, pulling the pale furs " that suddenly made sense- more tightly around me.

"You're... How can you...It can't be, can it?" He released my arm and raised his palm to shut me up.

"Please, let's just stick to Jack?"

2. Chapter 2: A nip and three quarters

****Note:** This is a recap of the first chapter from Jack's point of view. Short and sweet, as a bridge to the second chapter.**

* * *

><p>This is Berk. It's twelve days north of Hopeless and a few degrees south of Freezing to Death. It's located solidly on the Meridian of Misery... Which is exactly why I went there.<p>

I'd heard things had changed quite a bit since my visit to this coarse little spit of land but what can I say? I'd been a busy man: Causing Seas to freeze over for ice hockey matches, painting the trees silver, making sure the snow is precisely the right consistency for that perfect snowball sting, you know, the usual.

Granted, the wind brought me in for a pretty rough landing, dragging a monster of a blizzard along with it (not my doing, by the way) but I hadn't expected to see the exactly how it had changed when I arrived.

I never thought that the Vikings would ever get along with the dragons, but when I saw one riding on one of the things? I'll admit, it was pretty awesome to behold; Almost as cool as me.

It was quite a sight, watching this skinny little Viking kid darting through the flurries on a Night Fury, a creature I thought went extinct, but that shows what I know. His helmet was too big for his jug head but was still holding fast against the wind while he barrel rolled to avoid a sudden crop of dark trees.

Following by crook I kept low, watching him spin and wrestle until he noticed his stirrups has frozen rock solid. I bit my lip in guilt, even if it was misplaced. The blizzard might not have been my doing, but what kind of winter guardian would I be if I didn't save the occasional unfortunate drifter from its relentless wrath? After all, these guys have to deal with it a good nine months of the year, like, a baby's worth of it.

The situation had suddenly deteriorated by the time I finally stopped doing maths. The dragon was tumbling downwards, heading for a particularly treacherous looking copse of trees while the kid's helmet went asunder as they pin wheeled to avoid a high branch. I dove in with a wave of my crook, swollen with power to create an icy slope to soften the landing of the Night Fury. It was dark so the slope looked fairly transparent when the dragon hit it with a terrifying force, ending up sliding backwards in a panic. I landed to follow its descent, placing a hand on its snout to calm him down. The dragon gave me an odd gummy "smile" as I noticed the kid slumped over its scaly head. The impact must have jostled him too hard but it was probably for the best.

I directed the path to a nearby clearing and plopped the pair into the centre. Thankfully the blizzard was starting to die and make it easier to get them comfortable on a clear patch of ground. Thankfully the dragon seemed fine, although his tail seemed a little odd, as did the kid's left leg which I dislodged using my staff as a lever. The

dragon curled up on the ground and splayed a wing, gesturing with his feline eyes to his rider and then to the leathery surface. On his cue, I rolled the kid on to it for a better look at the damage. He didn't seem too bad either aside from a few cuts and bruises here and there, but the concerning part was how cold he was; as long as he slept, the warmth would keep spilling out, so I needed to get him moving again.

I took the decorative fur off of my shoulders to drape around his, pinning it in place with an re-enforced icicle. I nodded to the dragon, who spat a burst of flame onto a dry patch of earth.

The helmet was thankfully only a few feet away, reflecting the soft firelight. I picked it up with my crook and rested it by the dragon's festive looking tale.

"Sorry kid, but I can only keep you cold... Hm. I'll work with that." Giving the dragon a scratch behind the ears, I took my fore fingernail and thumb and with a flourish nipped the guy's nose hard enough to leave grooves.

3. Chapter 3: Two full Nips

A few blasphemies and insults later, the kid cottoned on to who I was. Unfortunately, I don't have the best reputation.

So there he stood, thunderstruck by the fire pit and with a face to match. It wasn't anger that I saw in him though, more like disbelief.

"What's wrong, kid? Dragon got your tongue?" I sauntered over -my natural gait- and casually frosted a couple of logs with my crook. "You figured out who I was, so what can I call you? Unless you prefer 'Kid'..."

"I _don't,_" he replied tetchily, folding his arms to then make a grab for the fur cloak. "It's Hiccup. Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third, Son of Stoick the vast and the heir to the village of Berk."

He drew himself up to his full height, puffing out his chest in annoyance. I couldn't help but laugh.

"Hiccup, seriously? What, did your mother have gas or something? Geez, that's the funniest thing I've heard for a decade..."

"Hey, don't you talk about my mother, _Jerk_ Frost!" He suddenly raised a fist, grabbing my shirt, to almost immediately release me, seeming to get a grip on his anger instead.

"You didn't know her..." Hiccup suddenly deflated and stared at his foot, reaching out to stroke the dragon's head, eyes downcast. At first I thought the kid was just being defensive, but then I could tell that there was much more to it when I saw him drag a sleeve across his nose.

"Oh... Oh. Aw, Hiccup, I didn't mean anything by it, I mean... Is she-?"

"Yeah, A while back." Hiccup knelt to the ground and picked up his helmet, turning it in his hands and went went back to the fire to look at it more carefully. "This is all I really have of hers." Said the boy quietly, eyes slowly rising to meet mine. They were green, like the forests were before I visited them.

I sighed and sat, weighed down with the mass of guilt in my gut. I stared into the flames alongside him, the heat and light hurting my eyes a little.

"If it's any consolation, according to my experience..." I started, but hesitated. Hiccup turned to me, puzzled.

"What?"

"It isn't the end." Silence. With a grimace, he turned back to the light, clearly annoyed.

"I don't care about that. I just care that she's not here when I need her most." He stood and was about to mount his dragon who had been taking a snooze by the fire before Hiccup had bothered him.

"C'mon Toothless, let's go before we're stuck with Yak Milk ice cream for the winter." I stood, placing a hand on Toothless' snout to stop the take off. He recoiled from the cold of my fingers. Hiccup looked unimpressed.

"Move it, snowflake. I've got work to do." He fitted his metal foot into the stirrup and flexed Toothless' fin experimentally, finding it satisfyingly defrosted.

"Not a chance. I've not been to this place in years and I want to see what's changed. With you, I see that it has in buckets, you know, with you and _Toothless, _was it?" I could see the anger boiling up under Hiccup's helmet as he guided his dragon to the left.

"Oh yeah? Could have fooled me since our seasons consist of Mild winter, Moderate Winter, Devastating Winter and interval frost. I'm busy making sure my village doesn't starve right now, so if you don't mind..." He was ready to take off but I grabbed his riding rope while he passed.

"Let go, Jack. Before you cause more trouble." That tore it.

"I saved your life, you ungrateful twerp! If you let me do my job, I can help you find your animals. In return, I want you to show me the village... It's been a while since I mingled, you know?"

Toothless stopped in his tracks, at the pull of Hiccup's hand.

"You're sure you can help me get them back?" He said, giving me a doubtful glance. I flashed him my acclaimed pearly whites. I frosted my left incisor for extra sparkle.

"Would I say I would if I couldn't? Give me some credit." Hoisting myself on Toothless' scaly back, I scooted forwards and rested my crook across my knee. Hiccup turned to glare at me.

"What? I've never flown by dragon. Besides, aren't you in a hurry?" I

patted Toothless' back leg to spur him on. "Come on, we're wasting moonlight."

With a heavy sigh of defeat, Hiccup turned and whispered to Toothless, who perked up and spread his massive, impressive wings. "I suggest you hang on to something." Said the Viking shortly, quickly adjusting his helmet. Hang on to _what_ exactly...?

A roar of wind was next thing I heard as the sheer force of abrupt aviation forced me back and almost off the dragon all together. _This_ was going to be an experience to remember.

* * *

><p>Next chapter, we switch to third person... And save the Yaks!<p>

QG. xx

4. Chapter 4: Yak and Forth

_**Note: Third person narrative now, as it's much easier to track.
__Enjoy.**_

* * *

><p>Jack desperately scrabbled forward and wrapped his arms around Hiccup for dear life with an undignified shriek, and when Toothless rolled into the clouds Hiccup's oxygen supply was almost cut off.<p>

"Hey, when I said hang onto something, I didn't mean me!" Hiccup tried to roar over the wind. Luckily he was heard and the grip loosened on the rider's waist. They surfaced the cloud and skimmed for a while letting Jack recover himself. The snow had thankfully stopped now and the moon shone cold and clear. Hiccup glanced over his shoulder to see his passenger engrossed in the night sky. The light made his hair glow and his skin almost translucent as the ferns of frost on his cloak shimmered and sparkled to match the twinkling stars.

At that moment, Hiccup could truly begin to believe that this boy was who he claimed to be. Every breath he took formed a scatter of snowflakes that drifted away in the suddenly quiet night air. Jack caught his eye and slowly smiled.

"You're really here, aren't you? I don't have a concussion or something... You really are Jokul Frosti."

"Please, Jack. It's strange, not everyone, well not _anyone_ can see me you know... So why do-?"

At that moment, the icicle pinning the furs to Hiccup's vest decided to finally melt, causing them to flap wildly. Jack grabbed the cloak and grabbed a snowflake out of the air, rubbing it in his fingers and moulding it quickly yet carefully into a larger flake. Hiccup looked on puzzled until Jack reached over and pinned the furs back to his chest, using what he now realised was a brooch. The Viking had to concede that even with all of his own ingenuity, magic could still be

rather impressive.

"That should hold a little better now." Said the boy in a self satisfied tone, now gazing down into the barren white wilderness. "Haven't we got cows to find?" Hiccup rolled his eyes.

"They're not cows, they're yaks. Big, furry and not very bright, so when they get lost they tend to panic and run in all directions...If we're lucky, they didn't do that." Hiccup scanned the land now, but they were too high to spot anything. He guided Toothless closer to the ground and tried calling before realising his voice would be carried away on the still screaming wind.

"It's no good, they can't hear me over all this noise. This is just grea- What are you so happy about?"

Jack was actually smiling and gazing upwards while tapping a rhythm with his fingers, which coincidentally happened to be against his ribcage. He bit his cheek to suppress an involuntary giggle, which caused it to devolve into an ugly gurgle.

"Just wait..." He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, exhaling the snowflakes. In an instant they were swept to the right and when they went, the whines of startled livestock hit them from the south west. With a flick of the wrist, Jack gestured with his crook the origin of the sound. The rider turned to his passenger briefly and was met with a raised brow and a sly grin. Hiccup instantly knew what to do next.

"We have our bearing, pal: head left!" he conveyed to Toothless with all the urgency he could muster. The Night Fury complied, heading off at a screaming breakneck speed. This might actually work, thought Hiccup in disbelief. They may have actually survived the blizzard. The only problem now was actually getting the stupid things home. As the sounds on the wind grew crisper, Toothless was suddenly able to pick up a scent and urged his rider to follow his lead until he saw the yaks huddled together in a fluffy, frightened cluster.

"There they are! " Hiccup exclaimed and felt a short burst of relief before a more overwhelming tab of anxiety. "Now we just need to guide them back to the village in one piece. Tell me, how quick are you with that stick of yours?"

Jack decided to ignore the insult and instead looked thoughtful for a moment. "How come? You got a bright idea?"

"I might..." The rider replied, scoping out the now visible glow of Berk's distant torches. He gazed down again and figured out that they could be back in ten minutes if his calculations were correct. They had to be.

"OK, we're making a corral. Toothless and I will direct them, I need you to fence them in. Can you manage that?" Jack leaned back and took his crook in both hands.

"Pfft, please, is Hakarl rotten shark? Trust me, I've got this." Without a moment's hesitation, he stood up but was clumsily blown backwards off the dragon with startled scream. Hiccup's eyes bulged in alarm and he dove in desperation to see if he could spot... That jerk.

Almost instantly, Jack hovered back and flew along side the disgruntled dragon rider and grinned at full wattage.

"Awww... You do care!" He crooned gleefully, spiralling out of the reach of the Viking's angry swipe.

"Stop messing around, slush for brains: We have more pressing issues!" Growled Hiccup, face reddening in utter exasperation. The nose wrinkle signified that he meant business.

If eyes could have rolled any harder in Jack's head, they might have unscrewed themselves from their sockets, but never the less he conceded with a nod, flying and waiting for a first direction from the pair behind him.

The direction was a purple ball of flame from Toothless' bottomless supply that almost singed Jack's cape.

"A little heads up next time, jug head!" He was graced with a lacklustre apology but was never the less promised a warning henceforth.

Toothless rose like a falcon and dived with his shrieking speed but pulled up at the last second to let his feet score the snow. He charged towards the cattle to their right, towards the village's North Western direction.

"Ok Jack, we need a wall... Now!" Toothless let loose a shot, causing the yaks to stampede directly towards the shimmering wall that had suddenly appeared.

Hiccup and Toothless pursued, loosing shots left and right while Jack erected more icy blockades to funnel the animals towards town.

He span in the air and gave a huge whoop of delight when he skid his bare feet along the top of a wall, and even Hiccup couldn't suppress a yell of exhilaration. The plan was working nicely until a calf broke from the frenzy, mooing in panic and headed directly over an inconveniently placed cliff.

"What is with the geography here?" Jack muttered, distracted but keeping with the main herd. He flipped to face Toothless and Hiccup who had just spotted the stray themselves.

"I'll keep funnelling these guys towards town, you two go and get the baby!" He yelled, which Hiccup thankfully heard. He careened away and dove just as the calf fell over the verge.

"Grab him, buddy!" Hiccup said, panic creeping into his voice. The dragon flexed his menacing claws and quickly grasped the baby without so much as a scratch. His rider exhaled a 'Thank Odin' and pulled up to join the main herd as quickly as possible.

Ice blasts scattered back and forth and Jack ran atop his constructs to guide the stampede manually with his crook. "All right, you fuzzy cows, we're almost back to civilisation, or whatever it is Vikings have." Toothless dropped the calf back into the throng, keeping pace with Jack.

"I heard that, _Frost_," Hiccup's almost cheerful voice drifted up beside him as he pulled even "But good job keeping the herd together. I've just considered something though." the Viking's lopsided smile slackened in realisation.

"Oh yeah? Was it that your face looks like speckled egg in a wig?" Hiccup turned and glared green daggers.

"Of course not, you frilly girl's chest plate!," He snapped "How in Thor's name are we going to _stop_ them from stampeding through town?"

Jack blanked.

"Ah, good point. Um... Ask them nicely?" He offered, snapping his crook against the hide of another possible stray, setting it back towards the others. The torches and houses in the village were clearly visible now, and the inhabitants obviously heard the thundering of hooves this close to the centre. Hiccup gritted his teeth.

"This is not good, unless... You're up to something _ambitious_." Jack raised a brow but kept his eyes forward, counting the seconds to contact.

"I'm listening, speckle face."

"I need something tall, thick, sloping, and pronto to encircle the animals without hurting them. Something like... A raindrop crown!"

Blue lips pressed together with a small thoughtful hum, Jack nodded and spun into the air, shining rivulets of light racing down his staff. With a scream of effort, he swung it towards the ground, the ice lattice meeting it with a mighty crack. The form dipped in the centre and rose at the outer edges like a tiara as the yaks hurtled inside, sliding more or less harmlessly down the natural slopes. Residual snow welled and drifted silently over the animals like a sedative.

Villagers from all sides stood awestruck as they observed the quickly calming cattle through the thick, clean ice walls. Toothless' gummy maw fell open with eyes like saucers as he trod air.

* * *

><p>Review with notes, constructive Crit, whatever.

**P.S: I'm sorry for the lack of Toothless love so far, but it's coming up. **

QG.

5. Chapter 5: Storm in my eye

A bit of a filler chapter before havoc is truly wreaked upon Berk. Enjoy dears, I'll update soon. xx

* * *

><p>They walked along side Toothless while they headed back to the village, agreeing that the dragon probably needed a rest after all the manoeuvres he'd been forced to perform in their last excursion. A few of the inhabitants began to trudge out to greet them, Stoick at the head like always.<p>

"That was some kind of stunt you pulled son, I never knew that Toothless could spit ice!" He clapped a ham sized hand on his son's back causing him to stumble forward under the unintentional force.

"Thanks Dad, but it wasn't just me." He gestured to Toothless and Jack, trotting and sauntering towards the people respectively. "I couldn't have done it without-"

"Toothless, of course! I think extra barrel of fish is in order tonight, lad. But for now, I think you've earned a well deserved rest. Tomorrow night, we'll hold our midwinter feast in your honour! Hip hip for Hiccup, everyone!"

The crowd gave a resounding roar that only the burliest of Vikings could muster and turned to retreat to their cabins without paying the shimmering droplet ice sculpture a second thought.

Stoick lingered, patted Toothless on the head and straightened his son's helmet. Only then did he notice the silvery furs pinned to his shoulder. "Eh, where did you pick up this? It's got to be white elk...?" Hiccup opened his mouth to answer, but was quickly interrupted.

"Ah, never mind. I'll ask later. Rest well son, we have a lot of preparations to finish tomorrow." He nodded to Toothless respectfully and lumbered past Jack without a glance, whose shoulders dropped a fraction.

"Uh, Dad, aren't you coming back to the house?" Called Hiccup after him. Stoick turned and shook his head.

"Someone has to get the yaks back in their pens and make sure they stay there. I'll catch you before bed. Probably."

"I guess you will. Maybe." Hiccup muttered, beginning his descent uphill. Jack hesitated, twirling his crook in his fingers. The young Viking paused and cast him a look of confusion.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Are you coming or not?" Jack looked surprised at the address, but took an inhuman leap, landing like a cat at Hiccup's side; They continued upward together.

"You were really quiet back there... Everything all right? It was like no one noticed you or something."

Jack's shoulders rounded for a moment before he gave an exaggerated shrug, eyes lowered.

"I'm used to it. Most people don't see me when they get to a certain age. I was surprised you could, actually." He turned and fixed Hiccup with a wide eyed stare, confusion and questions apparent in the

twitching irises. "Why could _you..._?" Yet, no answer came because they reached the front door and Toothless bounded onto the roof to make his way through the 'sky light' to his favourite cosy rafter.

A few chuckles escaped the boys as they watched until Hiccup opened the door. The Viking was making his way through when he saw Jack standing awkwardly again, leaning on his crook and avoiding his gaze. Hiccup sighed heavily in exasperation and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"All right, what's the problem _now_? Surely you've been in a house before." He extended his left hand towards Jack and kept the door open with his right. Jack glanced at the fingertips, almost in disbelief.

"I can come in...?" He took a few pensive steps forward while looking around anxiously "Really?"

The Viking became a bit vexed.

"_Yes_, for the last time you _can_. Now get in here before all the warm air's let out."

Slowly, Jack gently placed his palm on Hiccup's and entered the house at a creep. The boy watched the Winter spirit step over the threshold to his home nervously and released his hand to let him drink in the surroundings with his round, blue eyes.

Inside the wooden cabin was warm and inviting, two sensations that the winter Prince was not accustomed to in recent years. A large hearth housed a crackling orange fire, logs glowing contentedly at the core. There were carvings and animal pelts to adorn the simple furniture while mounted heads loomed above them.

Headed towards the stairs, Hiccup gestured at Jack to follow. "My room's up here, come on."

The pair creaked up the steps, the occasional 'clunk' issued from Hiccup's left leg. On the mezzanine, Toothless leapt down from his perch to nuzzle his rider, purring in his throaty way. Jack laughed and stroked his scaly neck. The dragon turned and rubbed against him in turn, looking utterly content until Jack reached under his chin.

"No, wait!" But it was too late, as Toothless dropped to the floor with a loud 'thump', sound asleep.

"Uh oh, um. Did I...?"

Jack turned slowly with a puzzled yet increasingly horrified glance at Hiccup who dragged a hand down his face, but was smiling nonetheless. He met the boy's thunderstruck reaction with a hand wave.

"Don't worry about it, not a lot of people know that about that spot anyway. I was as surprised as you were the first time I found it on this guy." A loud sigh of relief caused a mini drift to land on the desk next to him, covered with papers, charcoal, bits of metal work and some drawings. Jack picked them up carefully, resting his crook against a nearby wall. A few frost ferns spread out at the points of

contact, silvery tendrils unfurled and shimmered against the wood.

He leafed through them as Hiccup ran his finger along the icy patterns on his bedroom wall. "These drawings are really good, did you do them yourself?"

Jack scanned the pages with wonder until he found a familiar rendering. It was a sketch of Toothless plus a few measurements and off shooting ideas for saddle reconfiguration and tail fin efficiency calculations. He glanced down at the dragon's tail and really looked at the craftsmanship in its prosthetic fin. It really was a marvel, Jack noted as he pulled the red sail, a small brass winch clicking and locking as it fanned outward.

"This is really clever. Did you build it too? My fingers are too stupid for this stuff..." He received a small nod from Hiccup, still watching the silver ferns on his wall. Lip jutted, Jack stood and glanced over at the enthralled Viking, to the patterns and back to Hiccup.

"What's so special?" He said casually, raising a thick eyebrow. Hiccup put his hand back down and folded his arms, head tilting to the side.

"These markings are really something, maybe one of the coolest things I've ever seen. Each little curl is unique, like it's living and you don't think that's special? Don't you go around painting all the trees like this? How do you do it? Is it magic?"

A shrug was the initial response Hiccup got.

"I don't know, it just happens. I've been able to do it as long as I could remember. I'm not an artist, not like you..." Jack extended a pale hand and took his crook, leaning on it heavily for a moment. Then he perked up.

"I think I've just thought of something fun..." He said with an impish grin. Toothless had started to stir and blearily opened a luminous eye. He stood steadily and let out a rumbling yawn.

"Hey, back with us, bud?" A strange weed appeared from Hiccup's pocket and he rubbed it against Toothless' snout, the dragon's tongue lolled out of its mouth as it rolled gracefully to the floor, legs in the air. Giggling, he caught Jack's confused eye.

"Dragon nip; The big guy really seems to love it. So anyway, what was your idea?"

A pale finger was raised as Jack scanned the room for a cool, reflective surface. He found it in a highly polished decorative shield hanging on the wall. He took it down quickly and lightly brushed it with his fingers. The bronze immediately iced over with a fine matte layer of soft frost.

"All right, draw whatever you feel like." The shield was pushed towards Hiccup, who grasped it carefully and resisted the urge to flinch at the cold when he began to draw. A minute later, a line drawing of Toothless was completed with a little flourish. Without a word, Jack placed the shield on the floor and took a deep breath.

Purple tipped fingers flexed experimentally and Jack leant over the sketch, lowering his hands. They balled into fists and a sharp exhale forced them to uncurl, rising and bringing the image off the shield along with it.

Green eyes shone in wonder as a tiny Night fury clawed its way off the metal and with one of Jack's breaths rose into the air, flying a loop around Hiccup's shoulders. It dove and shrieked, firing a tiny burst of snowflakes onto Toothless who jumped and recoiled with a hiss. Upon identifying his assailant however, he plonked his rear back down, head tilted and ears raised in fascination.

Ice Toothless mimicked its bigger self, stretched, blinked, twinkled then spiralled into the air, dissipating into fine white snow, spreading and floating gently in the air. A large, pink tongue flicked out of the dragon's mouth and licked the flakes off of his own snout. Coaxed by a gentle breeze, the flakes drifted to the boys, falling gently.

Face upturned, Hiccup looked up in wonder at the miniature weather phenomenon, still slack jawed after the animation of his shield drawing. He shuddered when an especially large, cold flake landed on his nose, and Jack couldn't contain a laugh that proved to be infectious. The boys laughed as the swelling mini blizzard began to dust his room in a light powdery layer.

Breath fogged as the temperature dropped in the micro climate. Snowfall slowed and eventually stopped, and Hiccup finally lowered his head, mouth stretched in delight, mirroring the chuckling boy in front of him.

"You should really reconsider what you said before Jack, you are an artist..."

The said boy paused for a second, his smile dropped a fraction below his glimmering eyes.

"Really? You mean it?"

"Of Course I do," Insisted Hiccup, a shine in his own eyes "and between us we are going to have so much fun around here, I guarantee it, Jack."

The grin instantly back in place, eyebrows twitched into their 'mischief' position and the crook was firmly in the grasp of both hands, Jack felt a familiar flutter in his chest; anticipation.

"Now that's the spirit..."

6. Chapter 6: Lead Kite

***Note:** From this point to avoid confusion, Jack is a "young man", Hiccup is a "boy" and collectively they are "boys".

>Massive thank you for the support and reviews so far. A special mention for PSYchOtIC-teNdencieS who was kind enough to pick out some typos and grammatical errors for me.

* * *

><p>"Are you still awake?"<p>

Rustling sheets and a soft grunt when turning over was the initial response that Jack received. He sat back on his haunches and observed the sleeping boy in front of him. All of the exasperation from before seemed to have melted away when he conked out, something that the winter spirit had seen through many windows in his time but rarely up close.

"Guess not..."

The way that Hiccup had held himself seemed different from the others in his tribe and not just because of his stature or prosthetic leg, but when he shrank back and seemed not to want to take credit for his intellect.

Jack could tell that the other Vikings had some kind of acceptance for the Dragon whisperer's set of talents, but not something that would ever be more highly regarded than brute strength or battle scars; Ferocity would always dominate creativity on Berk, and the thought saddened him.

Embers glowed softly where the flames had burnt down long ago, far before Hiccup had given up waiting for his father to return. He consequently made up a floor bed for Jack that he didn't need, but appreciated all the same. The boy had then silently taken off his singular boot and placed his helmet at the foot of his bed. Toothless had warmed his rock with a quick blast of fire and curled up into a cosy, dark coil.

Jack remembered the way that his new friend had been ready to lie down when he remembered the furs pinned to his chest. He felt a twinge when he saw Hiccup trying so hard to remove them without damaging the brooch that kept the pelt in place, but it broke under prolonged exposure to the warmth of his hands.

Crestfallen, Hiccup had tried to apologize to him even though the winter spirit hadn't been upset in the slightest.

Nevertheless, Jack had forgiven him and when sleep had finally gotten Hiccup in its grasp, he had pondered about the kind of life this child must have had; How he came to build so many devices, how he had met Toothless, and what had happened to his leg...

But that would have to wait until morning: For now, he let Hiccup rest and lay back himself, planning all kinds of trouble for the day ahead.

THUMP. THUMP THUMP.

Unholy screeching greeted Jack Frost much to his displeasure when he awoke the next day, strangely surprised that he nodded off at all. He sat up, ran his hands through his hair, over his eyes and paused to come around.

He had actually slept? The thought still confused him because he didn't think he was capable of sleep any more as he never seemed to need it. Did he dream? If so, that was already gone. Oh well...

Lights had stopped dancing inside the blackness of his eyelids and Jack braved to open them. Watery yellow light filtered where Toothless' head partially blotted it out by peeking through the hatch. He wagged his tail excitedly upon seeing Jack awake and clambered down to lick his face which made the boy smell temporarily like fish. Stoick must have remembered the barrels during the night.

Hysterical laughter caused Hiccup to stir and as he turned over beneath his blanket, he saw Jack on the floor at the mercy of Toothless' relentless nuzzling. Tears rolled down his freezing cheeks, solidified and chipped off, rolling on the floor.

"Stop, Stop! I-it tickles! I c-can't b-breathe!" Hiccup heard Jack gasp, flushed purple. The Viking sat up and cleared his throat, catching the pair's attention. Toothless' ears pricked and Jack rocked forward with a bit less grace than usual, still catching his breath. After a moment he swept back his hair and stood, dusting himself off as casually as the post tickle jitters would allow.

"Do you wake up to this every morning?" Jack asked Hiccup as he clambered out of bed with a grunt. He put his boot back on and stretched properly.

"Eh, sometimes he brings presents: Half a nurse shark, fish heads, an occasional jelly fish. The usual." He started downstairs with his characteristic 'clunks' while Jack leapt over the banister and buffeted the air beneath his feet to land.

"That reminds me, I have to get his breakfast. Are you hungry?" Hiccup opened the door and stepped out into the crisp morning air. Temperatures must have raised slightly overnight, causing the knee deep snow to decrease into a more manageable ankle depth.

"Uh, I don't really eat, but if you have roasted chestnuts..." They trudged through the snow to the nearby barn, where Hiccup creaked open the beaten doors and selected a large woven basket.

"Chestnuts? Sorry, I don't think we have any. Not the season for them yet."

The boy hefted the basket onto his shoulder with surprising ease and shut the doors using his left foot. "So Jack, what would you like to do today? I've got to take Toothless for his morning flight but-

"Yes, let's do that! I really want to get the hang of that stuff." The young man's eyes shone. Hiccup blanked.

"_You _want to ride him?" He was answered with a feverish nod, pearly whites glinting in the muted light. Although he tried not to let it show, Hiccup was less than confident to let Jack take the reins to his best friend... But what was the worst that could happen?

Howling winds tousled their hair and made Jack's cape flutter more viciously than usual. The Craven's Maw was possibly the greatest flying destination on Berk, but only to the most experienced riders... Meaning Hiccup was uneasy when his new companion had pointed to the cliff with glee.

"_It can't be that hard,"_ he had exclaimed _"like flying a kite!"_

The young man had zipped off before Hiccup had even begun to explain the difficult aerodynamic manoeuvrings involved in Dragon flying and mounted Toothless to keep pace, making his way to the peak. Once he had caught up, he attempted to instruct Jack again.

Sat in the back saddle for a change, Hiccup bit his lip when he saw Jack's bruised toes rest in the stirrups. The mirth from the front seat was palpable when he caught a glimpse of the young man's sniggering face over his shoulder. Pale hands tightened on the leather harness as the novice leant forward to line up his dive off of Meek Peak.

Hiccup made sure his ropes were securely fastened (Jack had insisted he hadn't needed them) before carefully placing his hands on the rider's waist: being a pillion was not going to be a pleasant experience.

"All right, now... Toothless, I'm right here. If you need me to take over Jack I will at any time. Remember the foot locks I showed you and take your-"

Stomach contents levitated with a dangerous vigour when a sharp tug on the reins caused the trio to launch off the precipice. Screaming was not an option for Hiccup as the wind forced the noise to retreat back into his throat and the boy desperately clung to the whooping young man in front. The plunge continued and Hiccup could feel Toothless' anxiety towards the quickly approaching ocean. Through gritted teeth, Hiccup finally found his voice.

"Pull-Up-You-Jack-A-AAHH!"

Chilly feet pushed the winch into position three, causing Toothless to pull up with just seconds to spare. The dragon was spooked but still sharp. Leaning into Jack's intuitive directions, Toothless was seemingly aware of the rider's intrinsic understanding of the air currents, kindred to his own.

They streaked upwards after being propelled off of a particularly strong gust and fell back into an arc. A sly smirk stretched Jack's blue lips as he looked over his shoulder, turning around to his petrified passenger.

"What are you-?"

Time seemed to slow to a creep for Hiccup when Jack nonchalantly unclipped his leather straps. The young man's grin widened as the inversion caused his hair to stand on end, looking to the terrified boy like malicious icicles, but he was getting further away.

Arms and legs flailed in the air as he continuously tumbled head over foot, silently praying to Odin, Freya, Thor, even _Loki_ to save him from the current nightmare he was living.

Toothless finally straightened up again and completed his loop just in time to line up with Hiccup directly overhead.

Not skipping a beat, Jack reached out and grasped the boy's wrist, pulling Hiccup back into the saddle behind him. Nerves got the better of the boy and caused him to cling for sweet, delicious, _fleeting _life to the cackling Jack.

Tongue between his teeth, the rider righted Toothless' course and set them into a thankfully smooth glide over the choppy water. Jack could feel Hiccup's thudding heart hammer into his back, this inadvertently caused his shoulders to shake in silent raptures. The white knuckled hands around his waist de-clawed and the heavy panting subsided a few moments later, followed by the sound of a thick swallow.

Forehead rested in between Jack's shoulder blades, (the _only_ resting post available) Hiccup closed his eyes and waited for the adrenaline to subside, consequently letting it recede into a shaking, seething anger.

Jack was chuckling under his breath when he received a sharp dig in the kidney, indicating that his passenger was no longer a happy chappy.

* * *

><p>So yes. Loop de loops. Hope you enjoyed them.

This chapter was quite difficult but I think that ended up OK. As always, thanks for the reads and reviews. Will update soon.

QG. xx

7. Chapter 7: Down to Earth

"Lunatic!"

Bony fists beat themselves rapidly against Jack's back as he didn't even try to contain his roaring laughter. He had to admit that even though his prank on Hiccup _was_ a bit cruel, it was still hilarious. The blows didn't seem to bother the young man as he serenely guided Toothless through the salty ocean mists, all the while Hiccup was screaming and laying into him from behind.

"-Of all the slush brained, pig headed, scum sucking things to do, land right now, idiot!" The boy seethed when he saw Jack glance back at him with raised eyebrows and a twinkle in his cold, arrogant eyes.

"See, the first insult was good, _apt_ even, but the rest? Weak, man, weak."

"I said_ land_!" The young man's grin faded and he faced forward, sullenly bringing Toothless to rest of a spit of rock amongst the waves. Once the dragon touched down, Hiccup threw himself off and jogged round to the front to check on him. He ran his hands around the creature's head and scanned for damage on the harness. Everything still seemed intact.

"Are you all right, bud?" He asked, the dragon responded with an affectionate nudge of his snout in Hiccup's cheek. Relief raced out

of the boy's every pore until he spotted the previous rider hopping off the saddle nonchalantly. Hackles raised, Hiccup turned and stormed towards him. Jack raised his palms, occasional bubbles of laughter still giddily escaping his throat.

"Woah, chill out. It was just a prank."

"Do you think that was funny? _Do you_?"

"Yes. Extremely." _Smack._

Cheek cradled in a chilly palm, Jack stared into space on Hiccup's right while the little Viking rubbed the knuckles on his left hand. A rare sensation blossomed on the young man's jaw: _pain_. Slowly, he met Hiccup's eyes, dazed and apparently confused.

"You _hit_ me."

"Observant, Genius. Think: Toothless and I are _not_ immortal," A sharp finger jabbed itself repeatedly into Jack's chest as Hiccup squared up to meet his eyes "You could have killed us both!"

"But I didn't."

"You could have missed catching me!"

"But I_ wouldn't_." Hissed Jack, irate. He grabbed the boy's wrist and forced it back down to his side. Hiccup wrinkled his nose in defiance.

"You know how I did this?" He shook his hand free and gestured sharply to his left 'leg', not waiting for a response. He wouldn't have gotten one anyway, as Jack was silent.

"I damaged Toothless' tail in the first place because I was reckless and stupid. I lost my _own_ leg being _exceptionally_ stupid and reckless when I fell off of him in flight, from a great height, into a fire. He grabbed me before I hit the ground and I trust him with my life. I thought I could say the same for you after last night, but now..." The Viking sighed, reduced to a simmer and turned away to look out at sea.

Toothless seemed riveted by this exchange, having never seen Hiccup completely blow a gasket before. His luminous eyes flitted from his rider to the strange new cold one. His rider was obviously not happy and turned his back on the cold one. He didn't seem happy either and this made Toothless droop a little too. Ah well, they'd sort it out: he knew they still liked each other because the dragon could smell it.

Bravado seeped out of Jack like air from a balloon and his shoulders slumped in defeat. He shuffled his feet for a few moments with a hand in his pocket. He rubbed his fingers over the smooth form within, now hesitant about presenting it to the intended owner.

A large jade wave crested and crashed onto the rock and seagulls squawked overhead. Taking this as a spur to action, the Winter spirit went to Hiccup's side and crouched down.

The boy sat and glowered at the ocean, moodily slinging pebbles into

the surf. The breeze blew his auburn fringe swept back off his forehead to reveal yet more freckles and eyebrows knotted in stubborn frustration.

"You're right."

Green eyes pulled themselves away from the waves, round with surprise. Hiccup's neck involuntarily turned his head to face Jack who truly looked contrite. The boy thought he'd misheard.

"Excuse me?" The young man fought to keep his gaze level with Hiccup's disbelieving countenance.

"You're right, it was stupid. I-it was really stupid and I'm...I'm sorry. " He sighed and scratched the back of his neck while counting freckles as a distraction. "I guess when you're always young, you always think you're invincible and don't consider that other kids might not be."

Dropping to a knee to retain his balance in the breeze, Jack reached into his pocket and produced a glinting palm sized object. "Uh, I made this for you last night, while you were snoring."

The frigid fingers unfurled and Hiccup leaned over warily to take a gander at the trinket. It was a brooch, not dissimilar in size to the hasty snowflake he had accidentally destroyed the night before. The similarities ended there though, because the new brooch was solid in its half sphere design, yet delicately hollowed and segments excised to reveal a snowflake motif with exquisitely precise edges.

Tiny beads dangled from the encompassing ring and collided with the tiniest of clinks. The whole thing seemed to have no inclusions and the faceted innards caught the meanest light with ease. Breath caught in Hiccup's throat, one of the few times in his life where he did not know what to say.

"It's permafrost so it won't break or melt or whatever. I don't really drift off so I kept myself busy...So it was no big deal... Um, are you OK?" Those green eyes contained an emotion that the winter spirit couldn't fathom, hence making him feel a little uneasy.

The Viking gingerly took the brooch from Jack's palm, noting from the burning cold that was in fact made from ice. Slowly but surely a small, contained smile tugged at the corners of his mouth and he lifted his head for the surprised young man to see.

"Thank you... " He said quietly, eyes creasing as the smile reached them "For the apology, I mean. It was good, for a self absorbed blockhead like you."

Gleaming white teeth emerged from behind Jack's purple lips as the one thousand watt grin made its triumphant return. Hiccup stood, clasping the brooch to his tunic for safe keeping. He offered a palm that Jack took, helping him stand. Sensing the confrontation had come to a close, Toothless efficiently stood with a yawn and arched his spine with a series of pops.

When his back was straight again, Hiccup gestured for Jack to get back on. When he shuffled backwards the Viking shook his head and placed the reigns into the winter spirit's hands, then hoisted

himself on behind the stunned rider, clasping the leather safety straps back into place. Two taps on Jack's waist let him know that take off was now an option. Engaging the sail into position four, the young man rose on the incoming air current and sent them soaring back to the village of Berk, his head feeling a little light as well.

When the boys eventually arrived in the main square, Hiccup noted some previously unaddressed damage to a connecting rod on Toothless' saddle.

"We have to stop by the forge to fix this." He said, clambering off to lead the dragon to Gobber's shop. Children were giggling and playing in the snow, some building snowmen and others lobbing icy projectiles at each other. Hiccup caught Jack's sad, minute smile as the kids passed him by without a flicker of realisation and felt a pang of empathy. He remembered when he was little(er) and even more awkward, asking questions and generally being the bane of the adult population's peace.

It was only around the other children that he seemed to lose his voice and withdrew when they wanted to play rough house or dragon battles. The only time he could remember being accepted really was when an older boy had played with them all, even including Hiccup and paying him the most attention. He recalled the warmth and tingles of fun bubbling in his tummy, but not much else.

They stopped outside the forge cum dragon dentist, just as Gobber himself hobbled out, screwing an oversized toothbrush to his utility arm.

"Hey Gobber, are the fires stoked? I need to hammer out a few kinks in Toothless' connecting rod."

"Ah, typical Hiccup, always breaking things." The salty old blacksmith replied with a gap toothed grin. Jack liked this man already.

"Sure Lad, but tell me: who's your new friend?" The boys stopped dead.

"Wait, Gobber... What do you mean?" The man frowned, looking at Hiccup like he was more wrong in the head than usual. He brandished the toothbrush in Jack's direction, who started in surprise.

"What do you mean? That boy there; white hair, odd taste in attire, bare feet, better looking than you, not that it's hard..." Gobber leaned in to inspect Jack, who stood stock still in alarm. Both boy's mouths hung agape.

"And in serious need of a new stick."

* * *

><p>I hope you enjoyed this chapter. A bit slow but still fun to write. Sorry for the angsty feels, it should fill up my quota for a while. _

**Special mention to Psychotic Tendencies. Just to let you know, I'm not done with you yet. ;D**

_**As always, hope you enjoyed and review or critique if you like.
All notes are appreciated.**_

**Updating soon. **

**Q.G. Xx**

8. Chapter 8: Juice

_**Note: This chapter was completely written, but I didn't like the way it turned out so I pretty much flipped the resolution completely.
**_

* * *

><p>A mouse in the sights of a cobra exhibited more movement than Jack did under Gobber's scrutiny, relinquishing his breathing privileges to the clutches of shock. The blacksmith raised a sausage-like finger, using it to prod Jack in the forehead and out of his trance.<p>

"Oi, Lad: anyone home? You look like you've seen a ghost."

The young man closed his mouth and swallowed thickly, remembering to draw in a breath for good measure.

"More like you've seen one..." He muttered, the grip on his crook turned the pale skin on his knuckles almost translucent over the bone. Attention flicking between them, Hiccup decided to break up this awkwardness before it congealed into something worse: suspicion.

"Uh, Gobber, do you think you could excuse us for just a second?" Not waiting for an answer, Hiccup grabbed the stupefied Jack's wrist and dragged him out of sight around the back of the forge. Once there, he propped the winter spirit against the wall and grabbed him by the shoulders, finally capturing his concentration. He blinked twice, looking bewildered and just a touch fearful.

"Hiccup..." Jack said quietly, breathing heavy. The boy snapped his fingers in front of the young man's face to stop him drifting away.

"Stop doing that! Now talk to me: Why are you so spooked?" Hiccup stepped back, letting Jack stand on his own. He wasn't sure if it was wise. "Isn't this kind of what you wanted, for people to see you?"

Jack seemed to consider this before nodding slowly but without any real conviction. He pushed away from the wall and swung his staff anxiously, making and retracing his paces in the snow.

"Well, yes. But the thing is... It's just that I'm not used to it." He turned and focused on Hiccup, trying to direct his train of thought.

"You're the first person in memory who has ever been able to see me, never mind talk to me-" He flexed his fingers, bringing his hand to

his clavicle "-or_ touch_ me... But a grown man? It shouldn't happen anyway."

"Odd, I can't think of anything Gobber and I have in common apart from blacksmithing. I first asked to be his apprentice when I needed some help making troll traps. He was naturally eager about it..." Jack stopped pacing.

"Trolls? Did you say that guy believes in _Trolls_?" Hiccup nodded and raised his fingers to count.

"He believes in all sorts: Trolls, Gnomes, Sirens. You name it and he'll knock on wood while spitting on your shoes three times which is a little odd for a man his age," Hiccup paused for a second, considering what he listed "except that trolls exist._ Definitely_."

Jack's expression lit up with understanding and he hopped on top of a log pile in excitement, suddenly invigorated. He was buzzing with energy as he pieced together the evidenced that was just presented.

"Yes... Yes, that's it! His excessive superstition must let him believe in things with the intensity of a kid without even realising. How about that?" The thrill in Jack's voice confirmed Hiccup's suspicions that the winter spirit was an even bigger attention seeker than Snotlout.

"Am I wrong to hope that you getting all fired up isn't an ego thing? I'm getting the feeling that belief gives you... energy?" The question was answered by a practically vibrating Jack.

"Seems that way, my man. I can't remember "

The Viking nodded to himself, piecing the situation together too. It made sense that Jokul Frosti's power stemmed partially from belief, just like the Gods got theirs from praise and tribute: Of course, Winter gave him life, but the attention gave him _juice_.

"What if... I tried to get more villagers to see you?" approached Hiccup, catching Jack by surprise. The young man was twirling his crook like a propeller but stopped at the statement, cocking his head in confusion.

"You want to get the people to believe in me? Why?" The boy tightened his lips and rolled his eyes skywards before answering.

Because it seems to make you happy, Hiccup thought, surprised at his own brain. He may have even said it aloud if it hadn't sounded so... Dumb.

"Because it'll be something interesting for us to do."

Jack felt a little flutter in his chest that he couldn't put his finger on, but he smiled anyway. They had work to do and it seemed to have already begun with Gobber.

Rounding the corner of the forge, the boys spotted the blacksmith flossing the jaws of a particularly grumpy looking Thunderdrum. They approached him just as the man reached deep into the dragon's mouth

and extracted a tuna fish spine from between its left premolars.

"Ah, there you are, you little beggar. Thought you could escape me, eh?" He jabbered to himself, catching Hiccup and the new friend in his peripheral vision. Closing the Thunderdrum's mouth, Gobber patted her snout and shooed the much happier looking beast away, finally devoting his full attention to the pair.

"Ah, I see you boys have gotten back from curling your eyelashes and gossiping over cocoa..."

The tall one still didn't have much colour in him but he seemed to have perked up considerably, flashing a mouthful of perfect teeth in the Blacksmith's direction. Hiccup rolled his eyes.

"Can I ask you a question?" The young man asked coyly, looking up under his brows at Gobber in an expression that would have been disarming on anyone else, but on him it seemed... Devilish. Warily, the blacksmith nodded slowly and gestured with the toothbrush for him to continue.

"If I were to say the name 'Jokul Frosti', what would you think?" What Jack did not expect was the wide swinging of arms that caused him to stumble back into Hiccup who managed to catch him and his own balance at the last moment. The boy sighed and hissed into Jack's ear.

"Good going, slick. You've triggered one of his ran-"

"Jokul Frosti! That Bigger!" Roared Gobber, looking up and apparently cursing the Heavens. The stocky man plodded in a circle, canon ball fist clenched in anger.

"Cranky old Git always freezing my furnace and making hill climbing impossible! Have you ever tried to clamber up Mount Malice with a peg leg and ice on every blooming rock? Thor Almighty, if I ever got hold of his crusty neck I'd knock his lights out!" Now would be a good time to leave, so the young Viking placed his hand on Jack's shoulder and carefully placed one foot behind another.

As the Blacksmith raved, Hiccup had begun to back away muffling his prosthetic as well as he could, guiding the petrified Winter Spirit along with him and into a conveniently placed, empty stable. Out of the earshot of the raging diatribe, Jack released a breath slowly and looked at his only Viking friend. Hiccup shrugged and the pair simultaneously slid down the wooden wall with a moan.

"This is going to be harder than we first anticipated." Stated Hiccup flatly, gazing ahead at a stack of straw bales. Jack drew in his feet and leant into his crook, looking more than a little woeful. He glanced sideways at the still boy next to him who seemed to be deep in contemplation.

"I never knew I was so unpopular. I don't cause all of that stuff, I just want everyone to have a bit of fun during the bleak months..." He regarded a hole in the roof and rolled the crook between his palms in agitation.

"Plus, big tough guys falling on their butts is always funny if we're

going to be honest."

Hiccup said nothing, but rested his chin on his fist, obviously thoughtful. After a minute, Jack swivelled in the straw and crouched before the boy, who still didn't look up but started to speak.

"All you ever seem to do is pull pranks on people," he said slowly, finally raising his eye's to the Winter spirit's apprehensive face "But_ I_ know that it's not the _only _thing you do. You help with what you can do when it takes your fancy."

The boy propped his head on the elbow that had found a nearby bale. Jack cocked his head and mirrored him, resting an elbow on his right knee. Considering the statement for a moment, he wondered where it was going.

"What are you getting at?" Hiccup smiled in a strangely impish way, a glint in his eye that Jack knew so well: mischief.

"We need to show them that you can do good, all together, in a selfless act of pure, unadulterated awesomeness." Jack raised his head off his palm, fixing Hiccup with a sharp stare

"Oh yeah, how are we going to do that? It sounds impossible,_ Bonkers_, even. You're just a kid... No offence."

Those green eyes creased with a self assured smirk. Leaning forward with legs crossed, Hiccup exuded the phrase 'Eureka'. For a moment, he didn't care that his plan would earn him forty years of hard grounding, he just cared about righting the injustice that his new friend had suffered for seemingly his entire life.

"I just happen to be an expert at 'bonkers', how else do you think I climbed on a dragon? We'll show them the real Jokul Frosti. We'll make them love you for what's_ really_ inside... At the_ feast_ tonight."

* * *

><p>My Goodness this chapter was hard to get out! Sorry for the wait. Lots of work on at the moment keeping me busy elsewhere but I'll update ASAP._

**Like always, thanks for reading, review if you have any notes, critique or whatever.**

**QG. xx**

9. Chapter 9: The Ape and the Fish Bone

_**Notes: Sorry for the delay! I thought I'd start by getting inside Toothless' brain a bit and having his view on the situation. I decided that Hiccup would be known as "His Rider" and Jack would be "The Cold One". **__**Has anyone else noticed in "Riders of Berk" that the teens are still kind of mean to Hiccup?**_

* * *

><p>Toothless was currently a bit out of sorts. In the last few days

he'd crashed into the forest, been knocked unconscious by his Rider's cold new friend, almost took an unplanned dip in the sea, been abandoned at the forge and now even the robins he had been chasing seemed to be mocking him by flying into the higher branches of a tall pine tree. His Rider's father was the one to feed him last night, too! He had also seen his friend saddened by the Cold one's recklessness, which in Toothless' book was taking things a step too far.<p>

The dragon crossed his front legs and brooded quietly under the tree. Usually he warmed to his Rider's friends, sooner or later, but the Cold one just didn't seem to sit right with him. Sure, he had saved them with his slippery slope. Maybe he did know to scratch that exact hard-to-reach spot between his ears when it was beginning to irritate. Perhaps his affinity for flight and an innate ability to read the wind was something he had never come across outside his species before the Cold one, but the agitation he felt couldn't be ignored and the danger only seemed to increase with the Cold one's presence. The flicks of his tail started to calm and it settled into the snow around his back legs.

What Toothless couldn't ignore was the bond that his Rider and the Cold one seemed to have built, even in this short time.

He couldn't exactly rest his claw on it but whenever his friend seemed to have a good feeling about something, his intuition seemed to be spot on, so would now be a good time to doubt that? Could the dragon afford to second guess when massive risks seemed to be part of his daily life? He wrinkled his snout, lowering his ears in defeat. The probability was that the Night Fury wouldn't know until it was far too late and cost his Rider another limb _â€| _Or_ worse_.

Snapped out of his reverie by approaching footsteps, Toothless turned to face the boys now, luminous eyes narrowed upon seeing the Cold one skate alongside his jogging rider.

"I'm sorry, pal. With all the excitement I forgot we had academy today, we have to hurry!"

Hiccup slung himself onto the dragon's back, waiting for Jack to climb on. The Night Fury shifted uneasily when he placed a hand on his flank. The Viking reached down to pat Toothless' neck soothingly, but to no avail.

"What's wrong? Jack is a friend now, so stop being so tetchy." A throaty growl was all the response he got, but the Winter spirit raised his hands in a careless way, stepping back a few paces.

"It's fine with me Scales, I've got my own way of getting around. Wind?" A bare foot flicked his crook upwards and a gale filled Jack's cape, instantly slinging him into the air at an absurd speed. Hiccup watched for a moment as Jack screamed 'Yeah, baby!' into the sun, before gearing up for take off himself. The stirrup clicked forward and Toothless galloped, streaking into the air like a bolt of black lightning and catching the back lash of the recent gust. They sailed above the wooden cabins of the village and over the cliffs, gliding on a succession of thermal drafts. Soon enough, the young man descended from the low hanging clouds lead by his staff and pulled up alongside the dragon, who was less than pleased. Hiccup turned to

face his windswept friend and couldn't resist a little dig.

"You know what you remind me of right now? A big goose." The young man flipped and gave a thin smile.

"That makes sense, since they taught me how to take off properly in the first place," he reeled a bit closer, as if confiding "if you ever want to get the best flight advice, ask geese."

The dragon grumbled and whipped Jack on the cheek with one of his long ears. The Spirit rolled to the side, looking a little sheepish. "Uh, no offence big guy." Toothless sniffed and looked ahead, apparently putting an end to the conversation.

The dragon rider glanced sidelong and shrugged apologetically but the wind rider waved a hand dismissively, mounting the length of his crook balancing with ease, weaving and looping overhead to run parallel with the other boy. Grabbing the hook, Jack capsized himself and hung upside down directly above Hiccup, who at that moment decided to gaze up to be met with a pale, manically grinning face.

"Quit that, it's distracting!" Shouted Hiccup over the rushing air, nose twitching as Jack's spikes brushed against it. The Spirit stuck his tongue out and dove in front, climbing into a low hanging stratus cloud, streaking to and fro forming frozen bands of water that fell and disintegrated into glimmering shards when Toothless passed, accelerating to shrieking velocity so he could catch up.

Wrestling with the rapid onslaught of forces that suddenly bombarded him, Hiccup leant further forward to protect himself from the gales and streamlined himself in the process. By the time the rider spotted the arena, he and the winter spirit were neck and neck. They each other's eye for a moment before both zooming downwards, through the narrow portcullis. Toothless pulled ever so slightly ahead, claws scoring the stone when he touched ground. Skidding to a halt, Hiccup threw himself off the saddle and celebrated with maybe the most profoundly awful victory dance ever conceived. "Oh yeah, in your_ face_, Jack Frost!"

The boy continued to groove in Jack's personal space until he spotted the poorly contained expression that seemed to be a hybrid of smug satisfaction and mild pity.

Of course, it was always the way and in true Hiccup fortune a throat was cleared behind him. Slowing down his jig to a creeping halt, Hiccup rounded hesitantly and saw his fellow Riders, all seeming confused and rather unimpressed. "Um, I can explain..."

"Hiccup: Not only is your gloating embarrassing, it's not even accurate," scolded Astrid, clearly irritated by their leader's tardiness "You're the last one here today!" She paused for a few beats, grimacing and squinting in suspicion. "This really isn't like you."

"Astid, I keep telling you that_ I_ should be leader..." Snotlout swaggered forward, index finger exploring his left nostril as he raised a bushy brow. Jack looked on unsure of what to do, not liking the vibes he was getting from the stocky boy. He (unnecessarily) crept over to his friend's left but the little Viking looked away

with hunched shoulders, chin on chest.

Toothless and Hookfang seemed to have caught each other on a bad day, scrapping and gnashing teeth to the right of the group. Hookfang was gearing up to light himself when Toothless planted a blue flame directly inside one of his large, arched nostrils, causing the larger dragon to keen and retreat behind his owner, whimpering through the smoke. Snotlout paid him no mind, instead continuing his jaunty advance on the skinny Viking.

"Besides, why are you celebrating? You weren't racing anyone, except... Jack Frost?" He rounded behind Hiccup placing a thick hand between the boy's shoulder blades and giving him a shove. "Are you that much of a loser that you need to make up people to beat?"

Hiccup stumbled and fell before the Winter spirit could catch his arm. The boy landed on his hands but made no move to stand for the time being.

Jack whirled on a foot, incensed. "Hey, lay off him!"

He made a grab for Snotlout's scruff but his hand passed through that thick lack-of neck like steam. Fists clenched in anger around his crook, Jack scowled and grabbed Hiccup's shoulder, shaking vigorously- which looked somewhat odd to the onlookers.

"Hey! Are you just going to let him talk to you like that? Stand up!" The fallen boy didn't even flinch.

Astrid stormed over to Snotlout and smacked him upside the head while the twins sniggered. The Stocky boy whined and shot a glare at the warrior maiden, who simply stood there and tapped the into her palm in annoyance. "Quit it, Snotlout, you know he can't fight back."

A scrape of metal drew the attention of the pair, who turned to see the scrawny boy silently get to a knee and catch them in his green stare. Wordlessly, Hiccup drew back a tiny fist and squarely planted it in Snotlout's puffy cheek, causing him to skid back and slip on a slick of shining ice that Astrid could swear hadn't been there before. The bully fell with the grace (not to mention weight) of an anvil and landed heavily on his back, winding himself.

The girl's mouth hung open in awe as she looked from the groaning mound of meat to the unexpected victor who was currently rubbing his bruised knuckles. Astrid caught his tired looking gaze and went to speak when he got there first. "Academy is cancelled today. I've got some other, more important stuff to do."

Chains rattled in the steel rafters as Toothless followed his rider out of the stadium, growling at a startled Snotlout and making Hookfang recoil under his wing. He clattered up under Hiccup's arm and the boy allowed his dragon to support him up the hill. Jack stood and surveyed the stocky boy for a moment, clambering to his feet to then forget about the ice and slip again, falling flat on his rump. The Winter spirit hadn't known that Hiccup was actually going to try and punch the guy, but when he had Jack just knew he had to contribute in a small way. The timing had been absolutely spot on and he had folded with peals of laughter, but his friend hadn't shared in the fun. Something made it seem like this situation had been repeated

in the little Viking's life again and again, but this was probably the first time the boy had fought back. Was pity or pride more appropriate?

* * *

><p>I know what I want to happen, I just don't know how to say it at the moment. Updates soon._

**As always, reads and reviews are extremely appreciated. Thanks you guys!**

**QG. xx**

10. Chapter 10: What made it beautiful

**Note: Lots of dialogue ahead as Hiccup reveals a bit about his past to Jack. Hopefully I used the correct punctuation for this scenario but if it's wrong let me know.**

* * *

><p>Cornflower skies started to age with golden streaks of cloud when the sun began its daily descent into the ocean, and the outsider, the ghost and the Night Fury climbed an unassuming hill with a charming view of the coast. Hiccup seemed determined to walk by himself and had refused Toothless' insistent nudges for a ride. Jack skated along behind casually on tiny cushions of air, still ruminating on the outburst at the arena. As far as he could tell, Hiccup was certainly a black sheep where looks were concerned but he was on a whole new level in terms of mentality, too.<p>

The teens had seemed to not have a creative bone between them, nor did they see anything wrong with occasionally picking on the weak, but bullying the leader of their flight squad? What did the awkward little Viking have to do to finally earn some respect from his peers? It seemed like the only way he could would be to increase his muscle mass three hundred percent and/or to finally start breathing fire himself. Even the girl who had somewhat stuck up for him didn't have enough faith in Hiccup to actually think he'd defend himself when threatened.

When Jack had tried to bring up the event, he was met with a grunt of annoyance from Hiccup and the vague suggestion that he didn't want to talk about it. The young man had shut up about it for the time being, knowing the boy would probably open up about it when he was ready, whether he liked it or not. The act of violence in itself didn't seem quite so strange: What_ did_ was that the teens looked thunderstruck, like they'd never seen the little Viking implement it before.

What had made this boy turn from aggression and violence when it was all Berk had to offer? What had kept the notion that Jokul Frosti existed alive in that normally cerebral, rational psyche? When they finally stopped to rest on a grassy knoll, the confused young man decided to try and find out.

"Hiccup, can I ask you a question," Jack approached delicately, resting the crook in the grass and flexing his toes out in front "Something a bit personal?"

The boy reached into his pouch and pulled out some fish jerky pieces, cupped his hand and held them out to Toothless without looking in Jack's direction. "Don't know if I'll answer you, but ask away." Toothless lapped up the treats and rested his large, scaly head on his rider's lap with a sigh of satisfaction. The pale boy licked his bloodless lips.

"I never got around to finding out, but it just occurred to me that you must have believed in me, well, you know..." He gestured to himself "Before you saw me? Like _this_?"

Hiccup offered a tight lipped smile to Jack, who had steadily been freezing the ground beneath them. The boy didn't seem to mind and idly flicked a silvered blade of grass. He was silent for a moment, so the young man guessed it was a long story and settled comfortable back on his elbows.

"In case you couldn't tell by my 'friends', I hadn't always fit in here; Still don't, really. I'm not sure whether I was born to be puny, but no matter how active I tried to be, I never seemed to be able to keep up with the other kids, so I they left me behind a lot when we went out to play... But a freak blizzard meant they couldn't this one time and we had to stay indoors until it passed. The thing is, my mother had..."

Hiccup paused for a moment, took a breath, but composed himself quickly. Jack didn't urge the boy to continue, but knew he would anyway. He picked up a nearby clover and solidified the leaves before snapping each one off.

"She'd passed a few days earlier, and being so young I didn't understand, neither did the other kids, so they kept their distance in case bad luck was contagious.

" Anyway, an older kid from the village came to keep an eye on us, since we couldn't have been old than five or six. He was really cool, told us stories, played games with us. And he gave me extra attention," The boy smiled gently, fingers tracing his cheek bone "Heck, he even made me feel good about my freckles."

Eyes fixed to the middle distance, Hiccup looked lost in the memory, but also slightly confused, trying to recall it and failing. "I don't remember much about that day because it was so long ago, or the boy. I know he isn't with us any more... But I remember he was fun and and that he told me a story, about you."

Jack dropped the clover and snapped his head raptly to attention, his focus completely undivided for once. Hiccup grinned knowingly, very slightly smug.

"What...? Why did he talk about me?"

"He knew I wasn't strong or fast like the others, but that I did like to draw; I was annoyed that I couldn't scratch in the mud because of the snow, but he knew a little tale to help get me through:

" 'There was a mischievous Winter sprite who painted the leaves silver, who made frost ferns sprout on rocks and trees, turning the bleak night into a shining wonder land. He transformed each breath

into a dancing vision, sculpted sparkling icicles to hang from our roof tops, composed that satisfying crunch underfoot in the crisp fresh snow he brought and turned metal or glass into perfect canvases for finger drawings . His name was Jokul Frosti and he was what made Winter beautiful.' "

Jack looked amazed, touched even. Toothless had finally moved his head off of Hiccup's knees, so the boy reclined into the grass, staring up at the now orange tinted sky. The winter spirit leant on his hands and looked down at him, still brimming with questions.

"You really believed that story, even when you grew up? Why?"

The Viking shrugged from his position but kept his eyes on the burning clouds. "I suppose it just stuck because it seemed true enough. You don't look how I thought you might, but I guess you not being a creaky old geezer is a bit of a plus."

Jack raised his brows with a smirk and flexed a thin arm. "I'm irresistible, I know. It's a curse really..."

Hiccup tutted in disapproval, glancing sidelong.

"Hey, I'm not saying your face isn't still stupid, moron...But it does make it easier to talk to you, because you're not all dusty and 'Ye' and 'Verily'."

The boy returned to the subject with a sigh.

"Every time I got bored of being alone, I'd go make snow angels or draw in some freshly powdered puddle frost. You do those kinds of thing, right?" Blue eyes widened suddenly, as if a small light had flared behind them.

Pouting with concentration, the winter spirit trawled his memories of this place. Each year he only landed briefly in Berk but he did recall one time when a tiny freckled child with unkempt hair was sat alone in the forest drawing on a thin sheen of ice. His stubby fingers were dexterous in their execution of birds, bugs, trees and clouds. The little boy had seemed so sad when he had used up all the available ice canvas and sniffed thickly, gearing up for an ugly bout of crying.

The spirit had taken pity and created a new slick behind him before retreating into the trees with a sprinkle of snow in his auburn hair. The blue magic activated and child turned around at the sound, practically flailing in delight at the apparition of an extended work surface, getting straight to business with a field of puff ball sheep. The spirit had observed for a while and felt an alien pressure swell in his chest.

"Hiccup, you probably don't remember but I have met you before, when you were little... You drew sheep in my frost layers, the only kid on Berk who didn't just use my presents for pelting each other with snow balls. Not that it isn't fun..."

The Boy seemed genuinely awed by the spirit's consideration for his happiness without his knowledge, even all those years ago.

"You... You did that _personally_? Just for me?"

Jack placed a chilly hand on Hiccup's arm, smiling genuinely. "Yes! I'm so glad someone appreciated that! I was going to stop doing it but your drawings kept it in my repertoire."

Hairs on the back of Hiccup's neck stood to attention, and not just because of the cold fingers on his bicep.

His eyes prickled and heat spread across his nose but he managed to swallow the lump in his throat and smiled back, taking a shaky breath.

"I'm glad you did." He turned to the warm sun, that hadn't been so low the last time he'd checked... A swell of sound began to float from the village as revellers lit the central bonfire and smoke tendrils from the great hall's chimney rose into the early evening air. Hiccup's heart skipped a beat.

"The _feast_!"

* * *

><p>A lot of Head cannon exposition, cute stuff, a few little shout outs to Psychotic Tendencies lovely fics... And now I'm dead.<p>

As always, Read and reviews, critiques are really appreciated.

Hope you enjoyed!

QG. Xx

11. Chapter 11: Three Days Running

_Note: For those who aren't familiar with the term "Gilet" (Gee-lay), it's a sleeveless Jacket, not unlike a body warmer in modern fashion. It's also that fur thing Hiccup wears. _

* * *

><p>Preparations were thoroughly under way by the time Hiccup and Toothless swooped into the town square, flanked by Jack on the wind. Snow was still ankle deep on the ground but Vikings scurried back and forth, carrying platters of meat, bread baskets and wine pitchers through the warm, inviting doors of the great hall. The trio weaved through the crowd largely unnoticed and hurried up the path to the boy's home as Toothless veered right to get a head start on the fish barrels. Shutting the door on the clamour outside, Hiccup darted upstairs and scanned his room, spotting the large oak chest in the corner. Jack floated up onto the banister and perched, watching Hiccup flip the lid on a chest and rummage around in its contents. He pulled out a fresh, cobalt tunic and rushed to the other end of the room to grab a basin and jug of water. Placing them on the floor, the boy shed his fur gilet, unclasped the brooch on the inside with care and set it down beside the basin. Hiccup was about to pull off his tunic when a small cough stopped him.<p>

He had completely forgotten Jack was there.

"There's a tie on that thing that might get stuck around your abnormally large skull if you don't down loosen it first." A few beats passed before the little Viking lowered his top over his bird chest.

"Turn around." He said to the Winter spirit, who looked mildly surprised. The pale boy raised a brow disparagingly.

"Why?"

"Because I'm changing!" Jack still looked lost, so Hiccup conceded that modesty was a foreign concept to his guest. "Urgh, Never mind."

Cheek resting in his palm, Jack twirled his crook and pondered quietly for a moment. The boy was quickly scrubbing under his arms and around his face, the freckled skin reddening with friction. The young man sighed in impatience.

"Dude, I don't even know why you're bathing, you didn't even smell that bad."

Hiccup hyperventilated for a moment, finally dipped his head in the water, stayed under for about twenty seconds and emerged with a gasp, shaking the water out of his hair.

"Just because I dislike smelling like yaknog for more than three days running... But if you must know, it clears my head."

He leaned into the chest, pulled out a drying sheet but didn't use it. Instead, he placed it on his lap and focused on his bedpost. Jack dropped silently into a crouch and crept to sit across from the dripping boy.

"Are you all right, man?"

"Yeah. No. I don't..." The boy hung his head, deflated. "Not really..."

Hiccup inhaled, let it out and shifted his line of sight to Jack, biting his lip with crooked teeth.

"I always thought that my problems could be solved with brains alone... I still do, but I punched a guy today. I smacked Snotlout right in his big, dopey, slack jawed face."

Jack smiled, nodded proudly in approval. "Yeah, congratulations on that: it was pretty hard core."

Hiccup tightened his lip bitterly, shaking his head.

"No, that's not what I meant. See, you're probably normal in thinking that was cool, I should probably feel proud because my dad would be, heck his Dad would..." He laced his fingers and twiddled his thumbs. Jack had pulled his knees up to his chin and folded his arms on top, covering his mouth. He cocked his head but his blue eyes softened. The boy continued.

"It just doesn't sit well with me. Violence never resolves anything

painlessly and usually just returns ten fold, just like when we used to fight dragons. They killed hundreds of us out of defence, when we killed thousands of them out of stupid Viking pride. Sure, they were stealing our sheep, but would you chop off a guy's arm for stealing your bread?" He finally picked up the sheet and started to dry his hair, grimacing.

"If I were anyone else in this tribe, Toothless' head would have been mounted on my wall. I hit him with my ballista, trussed him up like a turkey. I was ready to cut out his heart and serve it on a platter to my Dad... But the fear in his eyes? It was just like mine."

An hand explored behind him, finally grasping the fresh tunic. Dropping the sheet to the floor, he pulled the garment over his head, only to stop dead. He paused awkwardly, skinny elbows stuck out over his hollow chest. He heard a snicker.

"You forgot the tie. Hang on, I'll help you." With no warning, a pair of cold hands grabbed the hem of the tunic, wrenching it down, forcing Hiccup's hands to his sides and pushing his head through the hole with an almost audible 'pop', ears burned from the chafing fabric.

Frazzled, Hiccup blew a bang out of his eye and stared into Jack's pale face, blue tinged lips stretched into a smirk. The young man leaned over to grab a belt.

"Arms up."

Strangely, Hiccup felt himself comply to let Jack wrap the strap around his waist. Rather than the gilet, Jack gathered up the furs and brooch: While he worked, he talked.

"Just so you know, you aren't weak." He remarked casually, wrapping the pelt around his narrow shoulders regally. Hiccup said nothing but looked on, slightly bewildered.

"The fact that you took the time and initiative to get to understand something scary rather than giving into fear? It's pretty rad." The Brooch clicked into place, catching the light. He brushed the shoulders down and adjusted the cape minutely. He caught the boy's eye and they sat in silence for a moment. The grimace on the little Viking's face relaxed into a soft line and threatened to lift at the corners until the Winter spirit ruffled his still slightly damp hair, ice causing it to stick up and flare in odd places.

"You really have to stop washing your hair so often though, makes your brain swollen and your lips loose."

Hiccup tried to look annoyed as he tried to smooth down his freeze dried hair, but his face betrayed him, instead splitting into a goofy grin.

He stood and headed towards the stairs, pausing at the top. "We have a chance tonight to get everyone to like you, Jack. We will get them to appreciate the things you do... You should really try to make a good first impression. So this-"

He gestured to the Winter spirit's foreign attire apprehensively. "You stick out a little. Sorry."

Jack tutted and rolled his eyes, unclasped his cloak and shed his vest, holding out the leather garment in front of him.

"Well excuse me for being a grubby kettle, Mr Pot. The only reason I'm not dressed en locale is because you're currently occupying my favourite costume...But it doesn't matter, I'm nothing if not resourceful."

Flipping the cloak both ways,Hiccup saw drab leather one second and glossy fur the next.

The prince of Winter grandly wrapped the sleeveless ulster around his shoulders, glinting beads of ice swaying gently in the long hairs. Pale fingers ran through his soft, white locks and frosted them into spikes that faintly resembled a fine, silver crown. He (naturally) left his feet unadorned. Jack picked up his crook like a sceptre and drew himself up to his full height, hand on hip.

Hiccup dragged a hand down his face. "Exhibitionist."

"I can't help it if I look more 'Princely' than you do, Master Haddock." The spirit dipped curtly into a small, graceful bow. The Viking waved his hands over his head and turned to leave, when he was tapped on the shoulder. A cold, metal object was pressed into his hands, glancing down he saw that it was his helmet.

"Unfortunately, I don't have the sweet hat to top it off. Never mind, it'd ruin my 'do anyway.

Orange light had been completely dissolved by a deep indigo by the time the boys stepped out of the doorway, causing Hiccup to panic, run, slip and face plant on the ice sheet outside his front door. Jack actually crumpled to the ground in a cackling fit, making no move to help the boy up.

"And that fills the accident quota for today." From his sidelong viewpoint, Hiccup spotted two fur boots step into his vision. He rolled and saw yellow.

Bent over him unhelpfully, Astrid shook her head slowly. Hiccup barked a nervous laugh. "Hey Astrid, fancy seeing you-"

A strong grip wrenched the little Viking up onto his feet and the Warrior maiden let go while he dusted himself off, staring down at her shoes. "Hurry up, everyone's waiting you know. Snotlout's face has swollen up like a jellyfish and Gobber looks about ready to eat someone else's leg." The boy straightened his sleeves but said nothing. The girl shoved her hands behind her back, idly fingering the axe she kept slung across it.

"About before, in the arena... We shouldn't have been so hard on you, for being late. You teach the class, so if you have important stuff to do then, you know- Like - Snotlout was wrong... And so was I."

Before anything could be said about the half apology, Astrid dashed down the steps and into town, calling over her shoulder.

"Get your scrawny butt over here soon, we're starving!"

Jack had been crouching, enthralled by the exchange. He stood with a smirk when he saw Hiccup's warm, besotted eyes. The boy received a sharp elbow to the ribs.

"Hmm,_ Astrid_, eh?" The young man purred knowingly. "Is she your Girl-"

"We're just friends..." Hiccup stated flatly, truth aching in every syllable. Jack was quiet for a moment before he grabbed his shorter friend's arm. This also grabbed the boy's attention.

"The little lady was right, we really should get over there." A hop, skip and a supernatural jump lifted the boys high into the air, clearing the square in a few heart stopping moments. They landed with a small yelp from Hiccup and a sly little chuckle from Jack.

Feeling it was too late to protest, the disgruntled Viking shot the Winter spirit a glare before straightening up, puffing out his chest as far as he could before pushing open the heavy Oak doors.

* * *

><p>The Feast next! I'm a bit torn between scenarios but we'll get there in the end.**

Reads, Reviews and Critiques are always awesome so I look forward to seeing what you guys have to say!

Thanks, until next time.

QG. Xx

12. Chapter 12: Heir and Air

Weaving through the crowd unnoticed, Hiccup managed to make it through the milling Vikings, rehearsing his carefully orchestrated series of sidesteps as Jack breezed through (literally, in some cases) the people behind the boy, who seemed to be getting the same amount of attention as he was. Something in the tightly contained posture suggested that this was nothing new for the Chief's little heir, but it meant that they could make it to the seats prepared for them at the front without too much effort.

Stoick was busy greeting, drinking and cavorting with the elder villagers to notice his son slip in for the moment. The Winter spirit noted with interest that another small stool had been set next to the little Viking's, marked with a sprig of mistletoe and a rune meaning "Milky".

It must have been the Smith's work, he mused, suddenly casting a sharp eye across the crowd to try and single out the utility hand or blonde beard braids. He was nowhere to be seen... For now.

Warily the young man perched on the stool, absently attaching the mistletoe to the head of his crook. Something didn't feel right, but he couldn't put a finger on it. For now, he cast his icy gaze over to Hiccup, who already looked bored. For a feast held in his honour, no one had even paid him a greeting, never mind any kind of praise. The

boy must have felt eyes on the back of his helmet, because he turned around with a muted, crooked grin, freckled cheek in his palm.

"I think it's the tunic, you know. I don't wear it often and people have told me repeatedly that blue isn't my colour." He ran nail-bitten fingers down the pinned elk fur "They also say I can't keep white clean. Or that purple makes me look like I have no blood, and black washes me out..."

An enigmatically dark brow arched at Hiccup's elimination list.

The boy caught the look and sucked in his lips, shutting himself up via vacuum. He scratched the back of his head, underneath the helmet line, cleared his throat and laced his fingers, waiting for Jack to stop looking at him with those hooded, deeply underwhelmed eyes. After a moment, he spoke.

"I'm going to level with you about something." He said flatly, slinging the crook over his shoulder and drumming his fingers on the shaft. Hiccup recoiled slightly from the swing.

"Um... Yes?"

The young man was about to speak when Stoick finally noticed that his son had somehow teleported into the hall. He threw his burly arms wide and almost caught his heir in the chops. "Ah, there's my boy, man of the hour!"

The chief bundled his son into one of his impressive arms and squeezed in a way he guessed was affectionate. Hiccup's purpling face said otherwise. Upon release the boy gasped and coughed, causing his father to clap a hand on his back a few bruising times.

"I didn't recognize you for a minute there, son. You know, since blue doesn't really... Eh, never mind. You're here now, so we can start the celebration!" Stoick took his son's tiny wheeze as a green light to go ahead. The hulking man stood and clapped his mighty hands a few thundering times, causing everyone to stop what they were doing, turn and sit in silence. The sudden hush was palpable.

Gleaming sea coloured eyes swept across the crowd, crinkling with a smile.

"My dear friends," he boomed, flaming beard rustling with each syllable "Tonight, we are all gathered for glorious feast, a feast that would not have been possible to hold at all if it weren't for the valiant efforts of just one of us..."

A beefy hand reached down and grasped the bird-like shoulder it was searching for. Jack stood and watched while it pulled Hiccup up (and slightly off the ground), the boy's helmet knocked slightly askew. A casual knock of the crook straightened it up, earning a grateful sideways glance from the nervous boy, answered with a minute icy wink. No one seemed to notice the correction. The oration continued.

"Once, he was the worst Viking that Berk had ever seen: Damaging public structures with his 'inventions', swallowing his own tonsils, hunting for trolls-"

"-That exist!" Bellowed a voice from the back of the hall. Jack's heart skipped a beat with each uneven 'clunk' of that crude wooden leg. Gobber hobbled to the front with a gap toothed grin. "Sorry I'm late, I couldn't find my silk skivvies..."

Stoick guffawed and shook his head. The black smith's eye panned the table, finally settling on the pale, frightened looking boy. He inclined his helmet slightly in his direction. The blue eyes widened to saucers.

"It's all right Gobber, we couldn't really start the festivities without you anyway... Now, where was I?"

"Hunting for trolls." Muttered Hiccup from Stoick's waist. The chief did a little double take, as if he'd forgotten the boy's shoulder under his platter-sized palm.

"Yes, hunting for trolls. The talking fish bone of Berk... But that changed when he decided to stop listening to his gut, to stop trying to be like the rest of the tribe... And to be the Viking he ought to be." He looked fondly down at his son, who gazed back up with questioning green eyes. The chief considered his next words carefully, choosing the option that wouldn't tar him as a big softy.

"So let's dig in before the boar gets cold: Three cheers for our hero of the hour, Hiccup! Hip hip-"

A thunderous cheer reverberated within the vast wooden arches as a hundred hairy fists launched into the air. Hiccup cleared his throat, raising his hand slowly.

"Um, excuse me, guys...?"

The second cheer completely drowned out the first, and Hiccup's address. Jack surveyed the crowd, who all seemed too enthralled in their merry-making to pay attention. The grip on his crook tightened as the whorls crackled with energy.

"I really need to say something-" The third cheer was beginning when the Winter spirit whirled the gleaming crook over his head and slammed in into the table, sending forth a freezing gust that blasted off a few helmets, converted a few beards to icicles and unfortunately fused a tongue to a tankard of mead one Viking had been sipping.

"Be quiet!" Yelled the young man, who was silent to all but two in the room. Fortunately, Gobber had sneaked off to the side to steal a turkey leg and had consequently been looking away when the magic show was occurring. He turned with a mouth full of poultry and raised a brow at Jack.

"Alright lad, no need to get all bent out of shape."

Stoick gave his right hand man a quizzical look, seemingly saying 'Hiccup didn't speak', however he must have when that Thor forsaken wind had swept through and froze half of the revellers. The little Viking decided to take this temporary hush as his opportunity to be heard in his teeth.

"Um, Hi. First of all, thanks for making me the guest of honour to this party, it's awesome, really. But I can't take all the credit for what I did yesterday," He raised a hand to his father, who had just opened his mouth to speak.

"And obviously Toothless did a great job too, it would have been impossible to herd those yaks and keep on their trail otherwise... But that's not who I'm talking about."

There was a low murmur rippling through the guests, Stoick fixing his heir with an ominously familiar look.

"Then who, Son? There were no other flyers with you..."

Jack's head snapped to the hand that suddenly rested on his shoulder. Hiccup stared ahead, took a deep breath and hurried out:

"It was Jokul Frosti, he helped me!"

The murmur died instantly. Then another sound took its place: laughter. It was small at first, a titter in the back, but in the next moment the hall rumbled with chuckles, whoops, guffaws and giggles.

The boys crinkled their noses in annoyance. Even the chief was wiping away a tear or two.

"Oh son, you really had me going there. I thought you were going to give us some terrible news or something, not tell a joke!"

"But it's true!" Hiccup called out at the top of his lungs, straining to be heard over the ruckus. "He's not like you'd think at all, he's not grouchy or old or even really mean..." Jack shot Hiccup a scathing look about that last comment, who was answered with a tiny shrug.

The commotion wound down while the Vikings caught their breath and Stoick was through with his son's fantastical tales. Hands on hips, he loomed over the boy.

"All right, that's enough. There's no such person as Jokul Frosti, he's just a myth."

"No, listen Dad-"

An angry scream caused Hiccup to turn and face Jack, who looked about ready to snap his crook in half. Completely forgetting that (almost) no one could see him, he growled in frustration.

"Sweet mother of Loki, what is wrong with you people? You live in a world with Dragons, you worship Thor, heck, I've met the guy!" Hiccup turned and raised his palms.

"Calm down Jack, you need to be patient with them."

"But it hurts. It hurts so much when they say it, that I don't exist..." The boy was speechless as he looked into the shining eyes of the pained young man before him, unsure if his attempt to convince the others was a good idea.

"Hiccup, who are you talking to? There's no one there." Stoick grunted, catching the attention of the boys (or in his eyes, boy.)

A loud throat clearing broke the tension, followed by a disgusting gargle and eventual expectoration into the corner. Every turned to see Gobber sidle up to the table and grab a bunch of grapes.

"Stoick, is your head going funny? Of course there's someone there. It's Hiccup's pasty looking foreign friend." He turned and beamed at Jack. "Found your seat I see."

"Gobber, what's the meaning of this? Hiccup is talking to the air." The black smith slowly shook his head, as if explaining to a child.

"He is right there, clear as day. Saw them by the forge earlier before Hiccup went to riding academy. Strangely enough, he asked me about old Jokul..." He leaned over the table and grabbed Jack by the elbow, pulling him into what the Black Smith thought was a clearer view for the chief.

"Slender lad, about this tall," He said, demonstrating with a hook "White hair, no boots, battered stick, needs some sun..." Gobber suddenly stopped dead and paused for a moment, feeling Jack's arm with his bare hand. Finally, he noticed how extraordinarily icy that chalky, faintly shimmering skin was. The Black Smith's heart skipped a little when he met his gaze with the guilty looking young man's, the flawless blue finally making him understand.

"With skin like frost... Stoick, you should listen to Hiccup... He's telling the truth." He didn't let go.

The little Viking looked up to the Winter Spirit, who looked more and more perturbed by the tightening grip on his arm. "I think now might be a good time for a demo, Jack."

Swallowing, Jack nodded his head and before Stoick could comment, he wrenched his arm away, raised his crook and with a breath of exertion slammed the base into the ground. Dazzling teal lights flashed like contained bursts of lightning, causing the heat to be sucked out from the room, the torches and fire pit fizzled out with meagre wisps of smoke.

A web of frost shot across the stone floors under the crowd's feet, radiating from the front table. It continued to spill up the walls, forming ferns and shimmering poinsettias. When the trail reached the upper arches, the ice lattice began to peel away from the flat surfaces and spin itself into three dimensionally structures. They stared up in awe as humongous icicles shot forth, swelling and cascading from the ceiling, rushing towards the stupefied crowd at an alarming pace. They finally slowed in the final growth spurt, stopping inches above their horned heads, silent.

Astrid stepped forward and reached out to run a finger along these monstrous forms, only for it to melt slightly under her touch and a water droplet splattered on her nose, sending a shiver down her spine.

Scared of what she might see, the girl hesitantly shuffled around and

faced the table.

Caught in the moonlight next to Hiccup was a tall, fine featured young man. His hair was like snow and his skin seemed cold and almost transparent in the unforgiving light. Purple toes wiggled under the table and a set of bloodless lips stretched into an uncertain grimace when her eyes finally found his vibrant blue ones.

Hiccup felt like he saw a mirror when Astrid stepped forward cautiously, staggering up the little step before the head table. As if reaching to pet a wild tiger, she gently brushed her hand against the young man's cheek, flinching from the icy skin.

The boy glanced at Jack, who seemed to be holding his breath, eyes squeezed shut. A second stretched into eternity for the dragon rider and the prince of Winter.

"He's _real_..." a small, reedy, disbelieving voice said, belonging to the warrior maiden. Everyone looked down from the ceiling and a hundred jaws hit the ground.

* * *

><p>They can finally see him, but is it a good thing? Nice long chapter, partly because I like description, partly because I haven't updated in a while. IRL stuff and the like._

**As always, I love to hear from you readers, so don't hesitate to leave critiques and reviews.**

**Thanks to everyone who is enjoying this fic so far, it makes it totally worth it!**

**QG. xx**

13. Chapter 13: The Thor Spot (side story)

Takes place initially waaaaay before the start of Berk To Burgess, except for the intro, which takes place in the future chapter 13 (in a brief period of peace.)

A little bridge to tide us over until the next chapter is done, which has been put on hold due to real life. :'D

* * *

><p>Hiccup turned and fixed Jack with a quizzical stare, blowing an auburn bang out of his disbelieving eye. He knew there were more pressing matters at stake, but it was too fantastic a statement to ignore.<p>

"Wait, you _met_ Thor?" He hissed with disbelief.

Even with hundreds of Viking eyes on him, Jack was caught off guard by the question. He gave a non committal shrug and a small nod.

"Yeah, once." He said with a weary tone. Stoick, overhearing, was struck speechless for one of only a handful of times in his life.

There was a hunger for knowledge in Hiccup's face, curiosity flickering behind those forest green eyes.

"Really? What's he like? Did he tell you why he hates metal? Is he really Toothless' Da-"

The winter spirit motioned for quiet and sighed heavily.

"_Met_ is a bit of a misleading statement, but I'll tell you about it laterâ€|"

820 AD

The skies had been writhing with lightning all night, so the clouds swollen clouds seemed about ready to burst with rain. Thor was pleased with his handy work, as this storm would be an absolute beauty to release on that little island set twelve days North of Hopeless. Now if he could just find his hammerâ€|

The Thunderer found it laying by his sturdy wooden frame (no giants had stolen it today) and adjusted his crown of stars, donned his travelling fur and stepped through his threshold to greet his faithful goats.

He wrapped Gnasher's reign around his left fist and Cracker's around his right, feeling the satisfying creak of leather in his grip. Mjolnir hung heavily from the holster on his hip and Thor felt like he finally ready to go.

Two sharp cracks of the reigns spurred the goats into action, muscles working like pistons as they sprinted, jumped and gained traction on the air, the chariot rising majestically into the cloudy night. The wind felt fantastic in his beard and he bellowed to the sky, calling forth bolts of electricity and mighty claps of thunder, ordering them to follow him on his trek to Berk. Charcoal clouds flanked the God, covering his descent upon the village when the strangest thing happenedâ€| One of them _sneezed_.

The moon managed to wheedle a sliver through the overcast weather and highlighted the cloud (affectionately named 'Cumulus Rex') in question. Sentient clouds in themselves weren't odd as far as the thunder god was concerned, but this night was not bitter in the slightest, at least it hadn't been when he'd disembarkedâ€| But now there was a definite chill in the air that he hadn't noticed before.

Leaning over the edge of his chariot, Thor stared into the cloud, examining it for any irregularities when a flash of blue illuminated it from the inside, highlighting a small, thin silhouette. Without hesitation, the God ached his hand inside the cloud, grasping a handful of plain leather cape. The being he dragged out along with it was a barefooted teenager, who yelped upon seeing Thor and clutched a battered wooden crook close to his chest. After a moment, the boy cracked a haughty smile.

"Evening."

Starry head tilted, the Thunder God stood briefly perplexed by the boy's presence several thousand feet above the earth when he remembered the court held in Asgard the other day, detailing the

exploits of an upstart winter sprite who had been flying around making all kinds of mischief. Loki had recalled his personal experience with a strange degree of fondness, but had neglected to describe the spirit in question. Oddly, Thor had expected this being to be Older.

"What is your business here, Jokul Frosti? Depart from mine sight as I have matters that need to be dealt with most urgently."

"Oh man, _Jokul_? It sounds so Dusty_. Can you spread the word that I like to be called 'Jack', at all?"

A strong gust caused 'Jack' to sway in Thor's grip, biting winds messing up his snowy head and causing Thor's furs to fly furiously, whipping back and forth. He did nothing but glower at an increasingly anxious boy who cleared his throat.

"Also, heard about the Night Fury deal. How did that work exactly?"

The Thunder god roared and brought the teenager inches from his face, so spittle unfortunately sprayed Jack with every consonant.

"I am not in the practice of granting favours, especially not to brigands and heathens like you! Remove yourself from mine sight, before you offend mine eyes further with your pathetic countenance and wear one's patience through."

Thunder clapped to emphasise the point and Jack submitted his palms.

"All right, I won't cause you any further trouble, my Lord. Just release me and I'll be on my way."

Thor did so without warning and caused the winter spirit to stumble mid air. With a minute nod and salute, he dashed off under the clouds and out of sight. The Thunder God growled and took Mjolnir in hand, resuming his task of unleashing a Hellish rain storm the likes the world had never seen on this poor spit of land. He grinned at the thought.

He sent his cloud forward and raised his hammer, tightening his grip in hammer came down and a rumble from within his Cumulus Rex signified the coming of

Snow.

Streams of sunlight were breaking the horizon, meaning that villagers began to wake, seeing the snow descend gently upon them. Thor was aghast and unsure of what to do. He hadn't stewed any decent winds to stir this gentle weather into a blizzard, nor could he change the forecast halfway through: that was just unprofessional. His knuckles whitening in rage around the hilt of his hammer. Moments later, that white mop of hair popped up alongside the chariot, catching Thor off guard which caused him to stumble. The teenager cackled with glee and zipped out to the front, scratching Gnasher under his beard.

"Happy Snow day, my lord. Enjoy your break." A hammer narrowly missed the boy's temple and he sped away on the wind, casually converting lightning bolts headed his way into icy snakes.

"Cursed Tiny Frost Giant, I shall cleave thee in twain!"

"Your brother takes this kind of thing much better than this, you know! Nice guy, good sense of humour!" The Winter prince called back over his shoulder at the raging thunder God before he disappeared down into a flurry headed for Berk.

* * *

><p>Apologies for the length, but like I said, filler. Once again, I will get the next real chapter up ASAP and continue with the main plot. Thor is based off of the old depiction, where he wore fur and a crown of Stars as he strewed Storms far across the sky with his Goat powered Chariot. _

**Any Feedback, Crits or even suggestions are welcome, just leave a review! I hope you enjoyed this!**

**Q.G. xx**

14. Chapter 14: Lion Hearted, Bird Chested

Notes: For those of you who don't know what treacle is, it's a kind of black syrup made from brown sugar. It's very sticky and very, very thick. It's a rather British confection and can be made into toffee sweets. Good for removing loose teeth.

* * *

><p>The world flickered back into existence when that warm, calloused hand withdrew sharply from Jack's face and he braved cracking open an eye.<p>

Hundreds of saucer-like eyes scrutinised him like a butterfly pinned to a board. There was no fear in their faces, only curiosity and shock.

Surges of energy began to rush through Jack's frozen limbs and swelling inside, similar to before with Gobber although this felt stronger... But it didn't feel right: This was definitely belief, but it seemed tinged with something else, something confused, agitated, even angry.

Astrid was still standing in front of the table but her hand had withdrawn to her chest. Her bewildered face was now furrowing at the brows and slowly reached behind her back to finger the large axe strapped to her back.

...

Something didn't smell right.

A fish fell from Toothless' retractable jaws as he pricked up his ears. The other dragons in the stable kept eating but there was a notable silence coming from the great hall, and the smell of extinguished flames. He glanced up the steps, seeing the doors were ajar and it was pitch black inside. With a minute growl, Toothless galloped up the steps and through the doors, gargling flame gas in

his throat, ready for for action.

The night fury was about to loose a shot when he saw the entire Viking congregation standing in silence, all apparently aware of the Cold one's presence. Despite the lack of windows, the moonlight seemed to catch the boy and illuminate him in the blackness, which was appropriate because the young man was caught in the metaphorical spotlight too.

Like an oil coloured serpent, the dragon weaved through the unnaturally still crowd and placed his head under Astrid's free palm, making her jump in surprise before it settled back reassuringly on his snout. Cat-like eyes flitted between his rider, his father and the Cold one. The father seemed still on the outside, but the rage bubbling beneath his skin wafted potently through the chilly air, completely unbeknownst to the boys next to him. This would not end well.

...

If any beard had a mind of its own, it belonged to Stoick the vast, who was visibly bristling as he looked from his son to the frost spirit and back again. The boy gulped but Jack defiantly met the chief's eye, challenging yet lacking in any true malice. He still couldn't believe that this little demon had met the Mighty Thor himself. His son had been about to ask him about it but Frosti had avoided answering, which in itself had been suspicious. Stoick was determined to make the pair come clean about the situation at hand, one way another.

"How long has this been going on, Hiccup? Why did you hide him?" The little Viking unconsciously shifted his weight to the right and stepped slightly in front of the Winter Spirit, drew himself up to his full height and pushed back his helmet.

"First of all, he was invisible to you guys, until right now. Secondly, would you have believed me if I said that an invisible pillar of our lore was following me around with a magic stick," the boy gestured absently behind him "and that he looked like_ that_?" Hiccup sighed and turned to face Jack, who seemed a bit undecided about that last comment.

"We can't have this again, he's a menace. He's plagued us since the time of the giants, For Thor's sake, he probably is from Jotunheim himself." The Vikings stirred, chattering and raising their voices heatedly. For one of the rare times in his exceedingly long existence, Jack didn't know what to say and instead looked down at his toes, examining the blackened beds of each nail. Out of his peripheral vision he saw Hiccup balling his fist into a shaking, white knuckled mass.

"I won't let this happen. Not after them..." The mutter was barely audible over the hubub, so Jack jerked his head up a fraction. A deep rise and fall in those narrow shoulders indicated a deep breath on Hiccup's part.

"What?"

The boy seemed to be talking to himself more than anyone else, but nevertheless responded with a determined flash of a green

eye.

"We're not getting ignored, not again: I won't have it," he stated, cupping two hands around his mouth

"Everybody, shut your _traps_!"

The sudden outburst stunned the hall into a confused silence and even lowered Stoick's hackles a smidgen.

A deep breath, shoulders broadened, spine straight... He could do this.

"The fact is that he's_ here_, Dad. Just like with Toothless and the Dragons, our people have almost demonized Jokul by only focusing on the negative side of Winter, even though the season would probably exist without him. The blame was misplaced."

Simmering down, Stoick relaxed his fists and scratched the back of his neck. Jokul Frosti wasn't responsible for the Winter months? How could it be? If he didn't bring the cold, then what exactly was his role?

Hiccup seemed read his mind, and delicately placed a hand on Jack's arm before he addressed the crowd.

"Jokul Frosti is not the Spirit of Winter itself, he's the Spirit of Winter games. He's the one who makes the snow slush- free so we can have epic snowball fights and ices the windows for drawing, freezing lakes for skating: All he ever tried to do was try to make a hard time a little more enjoyable when it would be really bleak otherwise. _He is on our side_!"

The collective posture of the crowd seemed to slacken as the anxiety subsided and even Astrid's fingers retreated from the handle of her axe. Toothless' hackles lowered when he heard the sincerity in his Rider's tone and the confidence with which he addressed all present, who also seemed to unwind. Even though the cold one smelt unnatural, he thought, he didn't smell... _Malicious_. While he let his Rider fall through the air to his doom, the Cold one seemed to have enough confidence in Toothless' ability to catch the boy even with his physical disadvantage. The Cold one had trusted him and the dragon felt a tiny bubble of guilt popping in his belly for not reciprocating.

"Furthermore," proclaimed Hiccup, feeling oddly empowered while delivering this spontaneous and utterly unrehearsed oration "'Jack' saved both Toothless' and I from a pretty nasty tumble into the black woods, he made sure that we were uninjured, kept me warm by giving me this." He gestured to white elk fur around his shoulders. Stoick nodded slightly in appreciation of the fine garment while a low ripple of chatter spread through the hall.

"He was the one who helped us recover the cattle and created that huge ice pen for them. I don't know how you guys thought I could do something like that, but I can assure you I didn't. Jack was the hero there... He was brave and strong, worthy of _any_ Viking! He is definitely a friend to our people... And he's a friend to _me_."

Jack swallowed back the slight prickle behind his eyes and choked out a breathless laugh, grinning at full wattage. He was genuinely moved that Hiccup would vouch for him so strongly, but also surprised that the boy could give such a resounding speech with those tiny lungs of his.

There was a dead silence for a moment, filled only by awkward shuffling and the occasional cough, until Hiccup gasped slightly in realisation.

"Oh, um, 'AAAUUUGGGHHH!'" He growled to the best of his ability, punching the air.

The rest of the Vikings took this cue and responded with their own roars, cheers and whoops of good natured aggression, although some of them still didn't know what they were celebrating for. Stoick finally exhaled his rage and with hands on hips proclaimed "If my son deems 'Jack' a friend of our tribe, then his virtue is not in question for the time being. Now let us feast before the pig gets frozen as well!" Carefully avoiding looking at the boys, the hulking man sat in his sturdy chair and chomped into a leg of some sort while the torches were lit once more and the band of bards started up again in the corner.

A unanimous shout of approval threatened to dislodge the gigantic icicles that loomed above the swarm of horned heads, but they stuck fast with the faintest tinkling sound.

Hiccup shot the stupefied Jack a surreptitious smile before the Winter spirit bundled him into a playful head lock. The little Viking flailed as his helmet clattered to the table and he was released with a (mostly) painless noogie.

"Great Glaciers, there really_ is_ a future chief in that big, acorn head of yours." Jibed the young man, easily dodging a flustered swipe from the dishevelled boy. Jack's smile faltered when he spotted the mild glares he was receiving from Stoick and Gobber, who were unashamedly muttering in his general direction. Hiccup didn't notice. He paused and shot back a disdainful glare.

"Hey, Jack, you OK? Maybe you should have something to eat, you look pretty pale-" The boy stopped upon seeing the young man's weariness and bit his own tongue. Of course Spirits don't eat, he thought scornfully to himself, That goes without saying... Something else they seemed to have in common. However, he did say he liked Roasted chestnuts. He'd have to see if there were any in storage later.

"Or we could step outside."

For the time being, he wasn't too hungry himself, so Hiccup gestured for Jack to follow and they began making their way around the rowdy tables, curious Vikings turning their heads and chatting between -or during- mouthfuls of meat.

Occasionally waving and offering a couple of contained, courteous smiles, Jack followed Hiccup out through the front doors, into the crisp evening air. The Little Viking kept going, briskly descending the steps for a few minutes until he was sure he wouldn't be seen or heard, while the Winter spirit tread silently behind, wondering what on Earth was going on with him.

At the foot of the stairs, Jack saw Hiccup's chest expand to an almost unnatural degree as he inhaled and then let out a humongous breath of relief. Thick white clouds sporadically formed and drifted out of the boy's mouth, which had suddenly pulled into a wide, unbridled grin as he laughed weakly. He grasped his helmet and tucked it under an arm while he swept back his unruly fringe, obviously overwhelmed by... Something his companion couldn't identify.

"That was... Incredible. Did you see that? They listened to me, to us!" The helmet found a new home on the first step as Hiccup's legs turned to jelly, buckled and caused him to plop into the snow before Jack could catch him, but even from his seat in the ice he seemed to be ecstatic. Jack finally understood.

"You seem pretty stoked about not being ignored. It's a good feeling, right?"

Hiccup nodded feverishly, palms in his eyeballs as he tried to regain some composure.

"It's been so long... The only time people will listen to me these days is when they need something fixed or help with dragons, it's such a _relief_."

He caught a nod of appreciation from the young man in his peripheral vision and Jack paused, eyes skyward to shoot a glare at the Sea of Tranquillity_. The moon shone back with a cold silence, not that the young man expected anything else, not after all of this time. He grabbed Hiccup by the bicep and pulled him to his feet.

"It's a good feeling, to be noticed by people important to you. You know, apart from Gods and ...other magic creatures, you're the first person to really see me in about three centuries."

Hiccup's gap toothed jaw fell.

"You're joking?"

"For once, no."

"That long? Wow...Is that how old you are, three hundred years old?"

The question made Jack pause, strands of silvery hair coiled idly around his index finger. It uncoiled as he answered.

"I'm not entirely sure, actually. It's as far as my memory stretches at least. You lose track when you've got no wrinkles to count."

Fascinated, Hiccup geared up for another tirade of questions when a boom shattered the stillness of the night, almost making him jump out of his skin. This thunderous sound repeated in a slow, menacing thud and a rumbling horn made the air thrum. The boys turned to the source, the calm, dark sea.

Approaching from the horizon at an alarming pace were a series of flaming spots, obviously belonging to ships, but without a better vantage point the little Viking couldn't discern what fleet they

were. He had an idea though.

"What is that, are they friends of yours?" Jack asked, scepticism coating each word. Hiccup shook his head and made his way to the foot of the steps. A white hand shot out and grasped his wrist.

"Where are you going?"

"To get Toothless, I need to get a better look at our visitors."

"If it's as urgent as that, then there's no time to find him." Without another word, Jack slipped his arm around Hiccup's waist, the boy instinctively recoiling from the cold touch.

"But, my dad-!"

"It can wait. Just hold on tight, Freckles."

Before he could protest, the wind rushed upwards and filled the Winter Spirit's fur cape to propel them from the icy ground. Hiccup wrapped his arms around Jack's neck in the nick of time as they soared upwards, eyes streaming from the acceleration. It was scary to be this high up without the reassuring presence of a powerful night fury between him and the Earth, but as if by telepathy the pale hand around his waist tightened its grip, pulling him closer to the chilly body that owned it.

Goose flesh crept up the back of his neck as he faced Jack, who caught his expression and returned it with an effortlessly irritating smile.

"To be clear, I'm not trying to be Fresh..."

Hiccup fought the urge to throw up his arms in frustration and instead growled out "Oh, Just go suck a...! Ugh, never mind: We have to get to Daemon's Point, over there."

He indicated with a nod and they veered to the left. Hiccup turned his flaming face away and gritted his teeth, glad that his glowing cheeks could be put down to the , his arms tightened around the Winter Spirit's neck.

They glided silently over the coast and up on the most prominent edge of Daemon's point, where Jack dispensed a bedraggled Hiccup to the ground, who scrambled to get a better look at the encroaching fleet. He fumbled for his spy glass and peered thorough it, his breath stopping in his throat.

"Good job you're such a twig, I could carry you around all day. My neck doesn't even..." The young man caught sight of the frightened bunny stance his little passenger was exhibiting, felt a twinge of worry and hopped to his side.

"I take it they aren't popping in for Tea, then."

"If by 'Tea' you mean 'Pillage' and 'Massacre'..."

"What, they're that bad?"

"And Worse. I thought for a minute that it was Alvin and the

Outcasts, but they'd be like a box of kittens compared to these guys: These are the Berserks, from the Uglithug territories... They shouldn't know how to get here, but they found us." Hiccup bit his lip while scanning the water to approximate the numbers.

"There are at least five hundred of them... And tonight is a full moon."

The shaking boy lowered his spyglass and swallowed hard, beads of sweat swelling on his brow.

"They don't know how to fear, but inspire plenty of it."

An unpleasant throb began in the back of Jack's skull, making it feel like his thoughts were swimming in treacle. His body felt stiff and a terrible blackness weighed down his heart. He knew this feeling. He knew what... who was coming. He shook off the feeling quickly and grabbed Hiccup by his trembling shoulders.

"Hiccup, I know this'll be hard but whatever you do I need you not to be afraid. Promise me that."

The boy looked confused, maybe even more scared than before.

"Jack, with floating death rapidly approaching on the horizon that's easier said than done. It's what keeps sane people alive."

Faint cackles echoed in Jack's mind and he bit his lip, grasping those tiny shoulders tighter.

"I know, but it will really make things easier in the long run if you don't give in to fear."

* * *

><p> A lionhearted Hiccup, a small victory for the boys and now the possibility of war to round off the evening! The Berserks are primarily featured in Cressida Cowell's book "How to break a Dragon's Heart". They are not nice guys.**

Nice, long update to make up for the gap, since I've been busy with real life stuff recently. Please enjoy!

As always, reviews, critiques and thoughts are always welcome and deeply appreciated, I love to know what you think!

**_Updates sooner rather than later next time, so stay tuned.
_**

QG. xx

15. Chapter 15: Flying his colours

**Notes: **

**Ansuz = ****The Gods**_** / Aesir**_

**Hagalaz = ****Hailstone**

**Ehwaz = ****Horse/cavalry**

* * *

><p>A scream of wind shrieked by while the pair stood motionless on the plateau of Daemon's point. Even though Jack had told Hiccup to reign in his fear, the young man seemed more than a little frantic himself, which served to unnerve the boy even more.<p>

Before he could ask about the source of his stark trepidation, Hiccup's shoulders were released, only for him to be bundled back against Jack's hip and the Winter Spirit dived off of the mountain once more, riding the air currents.

"We have to warn your village as soon as we can. The faster we can stop them reaching the shore, the better."

His passenger tightened his grip around the young man's shoulders and stared ahead, scanning the ominous lights flickering across the ocean.

"My thoughts exactly, but we need a strategy. I can grab the other riders and lay down suppressive fire from the air but it won't be enough with just the six of us. By Odin, I hope the catapults have been serviced recently."

Jack nodded, but his thoughts were divided between the little Viking's plans and the heaviness he had felt in his chest.

That thing couldn't be here, not on Berk. The inhabitants here were they embodiment of bravery, they had fought tooth and nail with dragons from generation to generation, for pity's sake! This island should have been the last place that he would try to envelope with his dark purpose... But he had found a way. He had recruited a group of warriors so dangerous and free of inhibition that even Hiccup had admitted the residents of the island ought to be afraid of them, and he had lead them straight to their doorstep. That fiend.

"Just don't worry about stopping them from reaching the island, Hiccup: Remember, you have me to help you fight. I can stop them in their tracks and you can dispatch them from your dragons."

The boy frowned pensively. "It's an awful lot of water, Jack. Are you suggesting that you freeze the entire sea?"

The Winter spirit raised a haughty brow and grinned with a reassuringly infuriating arrogance.

"Please, what you've seen so far is just a taste of what I can do. I'm energised by the belief of your people right now and I'm sure that puddle or whatever is coming our way won't stand a chance against this." he nodded to his crook, which glowed faintly in response, the mistletoe wrapped around the head fluttering idly. Still uneasy but somewhat emboldened, Hiccup nodded, gripped with a new determination that only Vikings could muster when they had to believe their bows and arrows could be victorious against the lightning.

"All right, I trust you. Let's go and mobilise the people... And pray that Thor is on our side this time."

Jack bit his blue lip and averted his gaze at the last statement as they descended onto the top step outside the great hall's entrance. The dirge of the war song off shore still thudded like a dreaded heart beat, but the noise inside the hall must have drowned it out, for the feast was in full swing when they pushed open the doors.

Music floated through the air, mingling with laughter and the clatter of plates while the pair weaved through the revellers, Jack finding it more difficult than before due to his recent tangibility. Before they could make it to the front, the boys were stopped by a gaggle of girls, including Ruffnut at the helm. They descended upon the apparently petrified Jack.

"So I heard you were an immortal ice spirit. I expected you to look older, not that I mind older boys..." She purred, the swarm circling the overwhelmed young man, rippling with giggles. Hiccup was trapped at his back but was now facing Astrid, who seemed much more chipper than before. The now flustered boy noted that the Blood Red Poinsettias in her hair made her look especially pretty tonight. She smiled warmly at him and smoothed out the shoulder of his furs.

"He wasn't the most impressive one tonight, you know. Where did all that fire come from during your speech? I'm so glad that you've finally found your voice, Hiccup."

At the boy's now perspiring back, Jack had managed to grab the reigns on his charm and cranked it up to eleven, flashing his immaculate teeth at the giggling girls, who all sighed in unison. The reaction reminded him of another adoring flock of birds.

"Ladies, I would really love to stay and chat, but I have some business to take care of. What do you say we catch up later, say, over snow cones? My treat."

The excitement was palpable and the buzzing girls squealed and swooned, Ruffnut closing in for a surprise smooch. On the other side, Astrid was leaning in for a kiss, when Hiccup registered an icy hand on his wrist. Without skipping a beat, Jack took the opportunity to duck out of the circle, dragging the aghast Hiccup with him and leaving Astrid to fall into an equally forward Ruffnut. They stumbled and fell to the ground, lips forcibly (and non consensually) pressed against the other's. The circle of girls gasped and Astrid, who was on top, pulled back in horror and scrambled to her feet, spitting and cussing violently while Ruffnut turned a little green, retching on the stone slabs.

"I think I just threw up in my mouth a little."

The girls would not hear the end of their accidentally intimate encounter for months. Snotlout would cry softly to himself later about missing it.

Hiccup glanced back at the commotion in terror while Jack couldn't suppress a low cackle, but he fought valiantly to promptly sober up. They quickly returned to the task at hand, the Winter Spirit pulling the little Viking back to the head table, where Stoick greeted them with open arms.

"Ah, there you are Hiccup, we were wondering if Hookfang had mistaken you for a lamb chop." The chief's cheer faded when he saw the worry etched on the pair's faces.

"What's wrong, son? Is there something else going on." His heir nodded forcefully, while Jack shook the frozen spikes out of his hair.

"More than you know, Dad. It's a pretty huge something, but I need you to tell everyone what's going on without them panicking," He glanced at Jack, who grimaced in concurrence "in fact, that last part is vital."

Stoick stroked his beard warily. "You know us, son: It takes a lot to get us lot spooked. So what's the problem?"

The boy looked uneasily from side to side and whispered the details quickly to his father and Gobber, whose eyes simultaneously widened and they stood up with abruptly, knocking Hiccup back into the wearily anticipating arms of Jack. He righted Hiccup and the pair stood, bracing themselves for the tirade they knew was unavoidably coming.

"What? The Berserks are coming?!" Bellowed the chief at the top of his lungs, brutally killing the merriment in the hall.

"Um, yeah. The Berserks," said Jack as calmly as he could muster "They're closing in fast so we don't have much time."

Stoick stood stock still for a moment, before addressing the people with a sweep of his powerful arm.

"Everyone, to your battle stations! Man the catapults, children to the arena! All able bodied Vikings will be needed to ward off this threat so let's get a move on!"

If anything, the crowd looked even happier than before as they instantly put down their pig legs and reached under the tables, each pulling out an axe, mace, sword or other weapon of some description. With a mighty cheer, they all filed out of the hall to run home and get their shields. The whole operation was very efficient and soon only Stoick, Gobber, Hiccup, Jack and the dragon riders were left in the cavernous space.

"Aah, there's nothing like a good old fashioned battle to round off a great feast." Gobber blissfully remarked, picking his teeth with the tip of a knife. He stretched and jogged unevenly out of the room, calling over his shoulder. "I'll be down at the forge preparing the Catapults, give me a shout if you need anything!"

Jack was temporarily stunned. "Wow, wasn't expecting that."

Pulling up to his full height, Stoick puffed out his chest proudly. "We Vikings live for battle, it's in our blood. I've been waiting to take on the Berserks for decades now, and now they've come, on a full moon no less!"

"Dad, that isn't a good thing." The chief raised a bushy brow at his son, with mild condescension.

"But it won't be any fun if the challenge is too easy. Be ambitious lad, it's good for the heart! But by your peaky face I can see most of the hot bloodedness skipped over you."

Rolling his eyes, Hiccup decided that time was too tight to retaliate and addressed his flight squad instead, where Astrid and Ruffnut stood strategically on either side of a nervous Fishlegs, both looking ashen while staring at their feet.

Ruffnut tutted and folded his arms impatiently while Snotlout peered around him, regarding the girls curiously.

"Hey, what's up with them, did they eat some bad boar?" He asked Tuffnut while Fishlegs flushed an awful shade of puce.

"Really, you didn't see it?" The male twin drawled in his obnoxious, nasal tone, checking his filthy nails. "Pretty boy and the runt over there moved at the wrong time and Astrid ended up smooching my sister. It was gross, and not in the good way. Everyone saw it..." He added with a sneer at Ruffnut, who consequently booted him painfully in the shin.

Fishlegs buried his round face in his equally chubby hands, swaying from side to side "I don't think I'll ever un-see that for the rest of my life."

Snotlout was devastated and had to fight the urge to let his eyes water as he faced Hiccup who was tapping his foot in annoyance. Jack, (still irked by the casual way the teens insulted Hiccup) casually flicked his crook at Tuffnut. He now found that the finger he was exploring his nose with was frozen inside the disgusting cavity until a good sneeze (or another deadly force) dislodged it.

"That's for the 'runt' remark." However, he tossed his hair playfully and gave a mocking wink.

"But not the 'pretty' dig: I can't help it if I'm irresistible." Jack crooned, blowing a snowflake Tuffnut's way.

Ruffnut caught sight of this and perked up, colour returning to her cheeks as she sighed and stole the snowflake. She then punched her brother in the nose, flooring him and dislodging the finger in one fell swoop.

"Yeah, don't pick on Hiccup, pea brain!"

Before the squabbling could start, Hiccup whistled with his fingers to gain everyone's attention. Once he had it, he pounded his left fist into his right palm to illustrate his next point. "The plan of attack, people. The villagers are ready for ground battle, but we don't intend to let the enemy on to the island. Jack and I have figured out how to cut them off before the coast, but it needs to be done fast and we can't do it alone."

The boy reached towards a smouldering fire pit and pulled out a stout, warm piece of charcoal, quickly sketching a diagram on the stone floor.

"We'll divide into three squads: As Ansuz team, Toothless, Jack and

I will freeze the ships and break the masts as the frontal assault. Astrid and Stormfly, you head Hagalaz team with Snotlout and Hookfang in shooting out the ship's catapults and ranged weaponry.

"Since the sea will be solid during all of this, I need an Ehwaz team to take care of any warriors who might decide to jump ship before they can grapple their way up the cliffs. Fishlegs, Ruffnut, Tuffnut: do you think you can handle that with Meatlug and Barfbelch?" The teens nodded eagerly, ready to leap into action. Jack noted how excited the group seemed to be about Hiccup's strategy and wondered why they couldn't apply that respect to the person and not just the ideas he came up with.

Everyone seemed ready for action...Except for Fishlegs, who timidly raised his hand to ask a question.

"Yes, Fishlegs?" Asked Hiccup wearily, used to the boy's even greater sense of caution than his own. The stout Viking gulped and asked the question that Hiccup really hadn't wanted to answer.

"Uh, why are we so scared of these 'Berserk' guys? I mean, we used to fight dragons, surely they can't be as tough as that... Can they?"

The little Viking dragged a hand down his face and sighed with a bitter taste in his mouth.

"The warriors who are coming, I honestly don't know if our people are prepared for them, no matter how strong my Dad thinks we are. I can't be sure, but there is at least over half a thousand of them and probably even more than that. We've never fought the Berserk tribe and I don't know if we're geared up to win, because if the stories are true then these guys don't know pain, fear or even mercy." He stood, running a hand through his hair anxiously.

"But there's no point hanging around here to find out how bad they actually are. Our best bet is to nip the threat in the bud, show them that we mean business and deter them from ever coming to our shores uninvited ever again.

An air assault is the strongest, most unique and most surprising tactic we have, so just do your best out there and send them crying home to their mothers... Go!"

The riders didn't need telling twice and sprinted out of the hall to saddle up their dragons for battle. Hiccup gritted his teeth and exhaled, suddenly exhausted. Jack handed him a tankard of Honey juice, which the boy gratefully accepted.

"Thanks, I forgot I didn't really have anything at the feast... Gotta stop doing that..."

Masking his worry, Jack pulled off his furs and considered them for a moment. After a few beats, the young man flipped them as he did before, now converting the silver cloak into a tough, long sleeved suede coat in a deep, rich chestnut shade. He carefully placed this on the table that Hiccup had set down the now empty tankard. The boy almost spluttered when Jack peeled off his plain white tunic, turning it inside out as he did so.

"W-What are you doing?!" Jack caught the boy's eye and smiled gently back, looking strangely serene. The boy fought to contain himself, abruptly remembering that the concept of modesty did not exist in Jack's world and silently thanked Odin that he hadn't shed his breeches, too.

The Winter Spirit wound back his pale, blue tinged shoulders, limbering up for the battle by stretching the muscles in his torso and abdomen (which Hiccup shamefully noted were deceptively more impressive than he could have previously considered.)

A minute later, the Frost Spirit turned his shirt back to its original side, only now it had bloomed with into a peaceful forest green. He pulled the shirt back over his head and pulled on the Jacket, regarding Hiccup in his furs. His eyes creased in approval.

"You're flying my colours, so I thought I'd return the favour: we're a team, after all, and those Berserk blockheads aren't going to know what hit them."

* * *

><p>The dynamic duo has a plan of attack, but will it been enough to turn the dark tide that's rushing their way? Next chapter, the beginning of the battle with the Berserk tribe!_

**Reads, reviews, suggestions, thoughts and critiques are awesome to receive because I like to know how you guys are finding the story so far (and if I've messed it up anywhere.)**

**Thanks so much for all the support and views, it makes it even more worth it.**

**Edit: MASSIVE thank you to Dragon Emerald for spotting my absolutely awful mix up with Ruffnut and Tuffnut! You'll be pleased to know that I revised it. *Shudders*That smelly boy snogging Astrid? No Thanks. **

**Q.G. xx**

16. Chapter 16: In his eyes a King

**Notes: Ballistas are mini catapults, and the Berserks who use them are based from Cressida Cowell's depiction in "How to break a dragon's heart", where they went mad at the sight of the Moon and lived in chains so they would be stronger in battle.**

* * *

><p>I lay me here to sleep;
No night-mare shall plague me,
Until they swim all the waters
That flow upon the earth,
And count all the stars
That appear in the sky!**

__**Franz Felix Adalbert Kuhn**_

The clinking of swords on hips echoed across the cliffs served as a dulled, sombre chime punctuated by the offshore war drums. It reminded Hiccup to look back at his fearless people with more than a little apprehension for the amount of faces he'd see again when he returned from this violent excursion, before the torches had been extinguished along the outskirts of town. He strapped himself tightly into the harness on Toothless' saddle, testing the tail winch as a force of habit, even though he knew there was nothing wrong with it. There was time to tamper with things like this when he came back home.

_ 'If' I come back..._Hissed his dark inner voice venomously.

In most situations the little devil was quiet, but in times like this when the weight of the world decided to condense itself into a black little ball in the pit of the boy's stomach, he couldn't get the bugger to shut up. Hiccup scrunched up his eyes and held a cleansing breath, willing the internal commentary to calm down. It didn't.

Who am I kidding? We haven't a snowball's chance in a furnace of winning against these maniacs. They're going to massacre us all, probably mount the dragon's heads on pikes, saving Toothless for last...

"Shut up!"

"I didn't say anything, man." The boy snapped his lids open, appalled that he had such little control over what spilled out of his mouth. He cleared his throat hastily and turned to Jack, sheepish.

"Sorry, talking to... Myself." Jack loosed a low chuckle and swung his crook over a shoulder, other hand on his hip, rolling his almost luminescent eyes to the bleak sea. Those deceptive little lights were almost upon them, so close that even the frost spirit began to feel the claustrophobic loom of their presence. He pulled up the fur trimmed hood of his jacket and polished his black edged nails on his recently acquired green shirt.

"Well, maybe you should spend less time gabbing to yourself and engage with _me_ more than once a blue moon. I'm tired of all this waiting, Hic. They'll be on us soon, shouldn't we, uh, you know, 'lay down suuuurpressive... Whatchamahoozit?"

The little Viking exhaled through his nose with a small quirk in his lip. He knew that Jack was only acting dumb to stoke his spirits, but not even the _embodiment_ of fun could ignore the gravity of the spectacle before them. Hiccup eyed the jittery teenagers, each eager to pull off the ledge and into the clutches of the ocean gusts.

And very possibly their premature deaths. They might as well leave the dragons behind and jump off the edge right now.

Another deep breath. They could do this, he had faith. Their strategy could work and they could win. They _would_ win. Leather reigns wrapped tightly around his thin fingers and the pink skin was bleached white. A slight nod to his team mate and a friendly pat to Toothless was all he needed to instigate the aerial assault. Leathery wings spread and fluttered ever so gently in the strong updraft by which Jack also allowed his body to be guided naturally, flanking the

night fury, keeping his all important crook safe in a dead man's grip. The rider and his wing mate climbed above a low hanging cloud for cover, thankfully unspotted by the fleet. They hovered while Jack carefully adjusted his grip, mercury-like veins frantically writhing up the shaft of his crook.

"Are you ready?"

"Does Snotlout stink of old socks?"

Deciding not to dignify the statement with an answer, Hiccup took the affirmative and motioned for Jack to move, spearheading the attack. The staff embedded itself in the cloud beneath them and the puffy white body grew, expanded and darkened across the evening sky, stretching across the line of ships in under a minute like the ominous shadow of J rmungand herself.

The staff sparked with that strange blue lightning and illuminated the length of the cloud, triggering the fastest, meanest freak snow storm that the tribe had ever seen.

Krakoom. A giant violet serpent blazed like an ugly scar across the night and unleashed its icy fury above the sailors' heads, beating the Berserker ships with deafening winds that would put a banshee to shame. In under a minute the snow on deck was up to their shins and to execute even the most basic of tasks became an Olympian feat. Hidden under blackened helmets, the blue paint on their skin ran down their faces, staining clenched, savage teeth until a blaring horn signal converted their grimaces into grins. One by one, the warriors reached down and unclasped the heavy chains from around their wrists and ankles, freeing them of their physical constraints as well as their mental ones. The eyes of the men switched in unison to an awful shade of violet and they let out a series of beastly wails, signalling that the proverbial gloves were now officially off.

The sails were out of use, so all hands went to the oars, pushing against the wind with a fierce efficiency, finally making headway to the mainland...

That was until Jack dived like an eagle and broke the sound barrier, rocketing across the sea at such force that it created displaced great black crests of water that instantly froze with the barest graze of his crook. He changed his grip so the crook now lead him, sprinting like a hare through the ice corridors it created, breath ragged wrought frost crystals with Hiccup in hot pursuit. The Night Fury was no stranger to speed and kept tabs on the Winter Spirit while his rider whistled with awe. His focus switched from the frozen crests to the Berserker ships themselves, scanning for a weak spot. There seemed to be a few more ships than he had anticipated, but the front line was incapacitated for the time being.

He pulled Toothless out of the storm's confines to fly further into the Armada's field, finally spotting his targets.

"OK bud, plasma blast, _now_!" Hiccup signalled to the dragon to aim at the huge horns located in the stern of each ship. He brought them in as low as he dared to ensure the accuracy of the Night Fury's shots, spitting amethyst blasts left and right, taking out the gigantic ivory instruments with a deadly shriek of his own. Hiccup reasoned that if they couldn't signal to each other, the fleet would

lose track of itself and tumble into chaos, encouraging them in all likelihood to make mistakes, and thus they would become easier targets for the remaining riders. Thankfully, the signal fires on their boats were located beside the horns and added a bonus benefit to the tactic. Some of the torches even toppled over and caught fire to the deck, causing the normally fearless warriors to give into primal instinct and leap into the dark sea.

Deafening, blinding and burning the enemy? Underhanded of you, isn't it?

Hiccup bit his lip so hard it actually drew blood, but he was too busy to worry about his mouth _or_ the voice right now. He knew that Toothless had a lot of shots, but even he needed a respite from spitting fireballs. They veered to the right, back towards the mainland to recuperate and to signal the _Hagalaz team_, loosing just two more shots into the sky.

The Berserkers were aware of the aerial threat now and decided to pull out the ballistas to combat it, gearing them up with flaming tar balls. Toothless smelled the smoking tar as soon as it was launched and intuitively barrelled to the left, his rider leaning low into the saddle, silently glad yet terrified that he had left his helmet on land for safe keeping. The flaming projectile almost scorched the dragon's tail and drew forth a panicked scream from the boy on board. Patting out embers on his sleeve, he swooped down into the ice crests, the freeze quickly spreading to the shore to reinforce the wall. It seemed so subdued next to the disturbed sea and the pile up of ships crashing into the sparkling white peaks, but it thankfully held fast. He dived and rushed along the inside, keeping an eye out for Jack.

No sooner had Hiccup thought of him, the spirit was running in the opposite direction, skidding and abruptly turning on a heel into a backwards crouch: fingers only lightly grazed the ice before he pushed off and sprinted to the catch up with the dragon and his rider.

"Darn," he gasped, "that cloak_ does_ look_ impressive_ blowing around like that. Wish I'd kept it."

Jack ducked to avoid a beating wing, pulling up alongside the little Viking, offering a cheeky grin and minute salute.

"Evening." He hopped, grabbing on to the side of the saddle and swung over to land in the back seat behind Hiccup, wrapping an arm around his tiny waist and resting his head against his back, catching his breath.

"Melting already, Snow cone?" quipped Hiccup, pulling up the cliff to find a safe perch for Toothless to have a short rest. He felt a low chuckle against the nape of his neck.

"I'm just getting warmed up, Lizard boy. What do you think of my handy work?"

"Not half bad: You know, for a sparkly haired pixie boy. Just so long as you didn't break a _nail_..."

Rider ignoring a light dig in the ribs, the group glided into an

alcove between the rocks and quickly dismounted. Fish jerky was produced out of a pouch on Hiccup's hip, along with a skein of water, which he used to quickly refresh and feed Toothless. He took a drag of water himself and turned to Jack, who was still catching his breath, sweat beading, freezing and chipping off his forehead. A light purple dusted his cheeks, so Hiccup nonchalantly aimed the skein at Jack and squeezed, spraying him with a thin stream of water. The young man jumped in surprise, turning just in time for a second stream to jet directly into his open mouth. Hiccup couldn't suppress a half smile.

After swallowing, Jack laughed despite being pranked. "Nice shooting... For a fish bone. Thanks." The little Viking smirked, but it faded when he caught sight of Astrid and Snotlout swooping past the alcove, heading in to provide a 'hail' upon the fleet. He scooted past Toothless and Jack to check on their progress, partially losing sight of them in the covering blizzard. As of yet, none of the Berserks had tried to mount the ice barricade which was still holding strong, but it was only a matter of time before something went wrong: it always did.

Pausing a moment more, Hiccup turned back to his team, determined and ready to go. "OK guys, it's game time. Get your war faces on..." Jack cackled as he climbed on behind Hiccup to provide extra fire power, metaphorically speaking.

"Don't put your 'war face' on man, unless you want those loons to laugh themselves to death." He paused with mocking consideration. "Oh, wait, on second thought, growl away!"

Hiccup rolled his eyes and launched them out of the cliff, black wings catching the air currents expertly. "Oh ha ha. Focus twinkle toes, we have a job to do." The waves had picked up, and began crash against the frozen crests, rocking the boats violently so they started to pile up against the icy barrier. The tail winch clicked into position nine to battle the gusts. Jack cracked his knuckles.

"Huh, looks like things are finally picking up! Let's go and show those bozos what happens when they pick on a tribe with a penchant for flying, combustive reptiles."

They veered back into the blizzard, Jack parting the flakes for visibility, breaking through with a volley of plasma blasts. Each of the scorching projectiles hit their mark and the flaming masts quickly caught alight, embers carrying over onto the dark sails and other ships. Hiccup reeled slightly when he saw more ships than he'd previously counted, throwing his calculations about the Berserker forces way off once again.

"This is bad... Jack, there has to be at least five thousand helmets here, most probably more. They really packed their guys in on board those ships." He glanced over his shoulder at the young man. "The situation is made worse by the fact these guys are starting to frenzy: the sight of the full moon drives them nuts!" Blue lips thinned and pressed together thoughtfully.

"Just the sight?"

"What?"

"Is it only the sight of the moon or the presence of it that sends them over the edge?" Hiccup blinked, thinking hard. If what he read was right, the primal reaction could be reversed by... He cottoned on to the thought train.

_That's right. Snuff out the night light... _

"Heavy cloud cover, that should do it. They should revert and probably even panic, lose formation. Perhaps even retreat." Ordered Hiccup, carefully masking his outward reactions to the dark inner dialogue, no matter how satisfying it sounded.

...yes, snuff it out and the children will cower.

"Way ahead of you, pumpkin nose."

Standing effortlessly, Jack balanced on the saddle and aimed his crook skyward, breathed in through his nose and exhaled a flurry. "Here I go."

The light show was spectacular, visible even from the cliffs of Berk._ Ehwaz_ team had been signalled by _Hagalaz_ to help dispatch the ballistas with great success, since the ice wall had held strong and tall enough to stop any enemies from scaling its slippery verges. When the blue, jittery lightning started however, they were like fascinated moths, hovering and help captive just like everyone else who saw it.

Unlike lightning, the flashes were not silent, each ministration sounding like the shatter of glass, or more accurately the amplified snapping of an icicle which forced Hiccup to wrestle with Toothless to keep control. The dragon persevered and Jack -naturally- retained his footing, the arm on his crook locked without a tremble.

A thick, strangely sharp looking cloud was beginning to swell, snuffing out the stars like a smothering blanket until it filled the sky. The moon was the last to go, its beams choking through the gaps until they too was extinguished.

The noise subsided and the crackles stopped, making every human blink its eyes trying to adjust to the blackness. Blue shapes fluttered in front of Hiccup's eyes and faded with every blink. The smouldering of battle ships was the only illumination he had and he used it to scan the area. It had grown deadly silent apart from the crashing of waves. Wails from the Berserkers had ceased and now he almost wished they hadn't, finding the absence of them even eerier.

He caught sight of Jack, now in a crouch behind him. He was limned in orange, white hair shimmering gold with eyes maintaining their blue despite the light. The Winter Spirit returned Hiccup's stare, observing the blazing auburn hair caught in the wind and furs that whipped like a flickering flame: The calm forest green eyes he had come to know now burned amber.

Both saw a king in his own right, but neither felt the choice they had made was worthy of one.

"Jack, I can't really explain why, but I think we might have taken that last idea a little too far."

"Agreed, I'll see if I can disperse this a_ bit._"

Twang.

The Winter Spirit raised his crook, only to feel something sharp shoot him in shoulder, the shock waves spreading inside his chest and making him fall back into the saddle.

"If it's all the same Frost, I'd rather you_ didn't..._"

A throbbing pain ached inside his sternum, making him gasp and almost lose grip on the crook's shaft. Hiccup was understandably alarmed. The young man looked to be in serious pain, something that the boy had never seen.

"Hey, are you all right!?" He reached over to shake Jack, only for an icy hand to stop him. It didn't belong to his companion.

The boy glanced down at the grey, black nailed fingers that rested on his wrist, slender digits wrapped elegantly around it like an asp. His eyes involuntarily progressed up a dark gradient that was the limb, to a smooth shoulder and finally a golden eclipse. A shift in the shadows revealed a second eclipse, both suddenly flicking down to examine Hiccup's petrified face. Below what he now recognized as eyes, thin lips peeled back to reveal a set of sharp, predatory teeth that were permanently set to 'sneer'.

"Muh-Muh..." The boy stammered, the colour draining from his face. The set of teeth widened to reveal even more of themselves as the terrifying head inclined politely.

"Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third, it's truly a pleasure to meet you after all this time. Granted, out of all the residents of Berk, I know you the best: so cautious, so frightened for the fate of your _people_, your _dragon_, your _own skin_..." A second hand reached to tuck a piece of hair behind his ear.

The touch was cool, but clammy, not like Jack's biting cold. This was almost slimy and chilled him to the bone in the worst possible way when those fingers traced down from the line of his jaw and under his chin. A forefinger and thumb held it in place.

"Now tell me, since I know_ you_ so_ intimately_: Can you tell me _my_ name?"

Managing to will some moisture into his Saharan throat, Hiccup managed to shakily choke out what he failed to before.

"_Mara._"

* * *

><p>So Pitch or "Mara" as he's known in Norse mythology has arrived. Snuffing out the "Night Light" was a small nod to William Joyce's character of the same name. Night Light influenced Jack's design quite a bit, possessing both white hair and a staff. He was Manny's bodyguard and was lost in a fight with Pitch, trapped within his heart until further notice._

**FYI, things are gonna get a little dark around here in the next few chapters, but bear with me. **

**As always, thanks so much for reading. Critiques, suggestions and even just general reviews are awesome so feel free to leave them! It's always great to know what you think.**

**Updates soon.**

**I'll compile a playlist for this chapter on the 'berktobugess' tumblr.**

**Q.G. Xxx**

17. Chapter 17: Ink, Sweat and Mirrors

**Notes: **

"Darkness came in the shifting form of a villain named*_Pitch_****. The dreams he hungered for the most were those of children, the pure of heart. He could sense children from seven planets off, and with a mere touch of his hands, he could leave them plagued with Nightmares for the rest of their lives."**

**-William**** Joyce, on**** Pitch**_**.**_

* * *

><p>The barrage of flaming tar balls had ceased along with the blue flashes on the horizon when Astrid pulled Stormfly into a hover, catching her breath. The only break in the darkness came from the smouldering ships below, providing just enough light for the girl to spot Hiccup and Toothless hovering as well. Jack was also visible and had settled into a crouch, presumably to rest after the spectacle he'd just wrought.<p>

Astrid gleaned Hiccup's plan to blot out the moonlight but she had never expecting everything to be so black afterwards, even the star light couldn't filter through, but there was something else: Not just the physical darkness had arrived, an icy sensation ran down her spines and was making Stormfly uneasy.

"Hey, calm down girl, nothing to be afraid of..." She lied through her teeth, trying to fight the almost alien sensation herself. Snotlout pulled up alongside her, looking singed and a little worse for wear, but Hookfang was thrashing like a eel out of water.

"Hookfang, calm down, do you want us both to die?! Geez, what's going on here, what's Hiccup doing down there, taking in some rays?" Snotlout asked like a machine gun that fired questions, words were bullets rattling from his obnoxious mouth.

Shooting Hookfang a glare that instantly stopped his wriggling, Astrid pondered for a moment. "I'm not sure: seems like he and Frost boy are taking a break, but Toothless doesn't seem all that-"

The Winter Spirit had dropped to his knees and Hiccup had drawn back,

staggering in surprise. Something really wasn't right. Jack was struggling to get up, as if struck and when she heard the distant scream Astrid knew she had to act quickly.

Boots firmly squeezing into Stormfly's flank, the girl urged her dragon into rapid flight, Hookfang in her wake. As Astrid surged closer, she could make out more of Hiccup's petrified posture, looking up at something that seemed to shift beyond comprehension while Toothless wrestled in the air beneath him. Then, the strangest thing happened: Jack reached out, latching desperately to the boy's hand, then for them both to be consumed by- black s_and_?

It cleared almost as quickly as it came, but had departed with the boys in its thrall, leaving Toothless helpless in the air, saddle empty, harness flapping as he tumbled.

Seeing the dragon as he plummeted towards the swirling depths, Astrid and Snotlout dove to save the poor creature, Hookfang getting there first and catching him gently in his talons. Astrid sat aghast atop Stormfly, scanning for any trace of the boys. There was none to be found.

Xx

Still straddling Toothless, Hiccup had frozen in the grip of the Nightmare king. This figure certainly looked the part with a fan of black hair in permanent shock, a great leather-lined fur billowing and curling around him and with skin reminiscent of a manta ray, underclothes integrated into his grainy surface.

He flitted his attention as best he could to Jack, who was struggling to rise with a lacquered ebony arrow protruding from his torso. The young man frantically reached a hand over to the back of his shoulder, wrapping his purpled fingers around the arrow's shaft and wrenched the cursed thing out of his flesh.

An awful yell tore itself from his throat and Hiccup mustered all his strength to try and reach out again. The point had punctured the jacket and syrupy blood was leaking from the wound, staining like ink.

"Jack, hang in there, I'll get hel..." The grip returned around his neck this time, cutting off the boy's valour and air simultaneously. The Nightmare king tutted as he tightened the hand around the boy's throat and muttered in his ear.

"Oh, would you look at that: Snow men can bleed, too." The dark figure flashed his awful teeth as he watched the Winter Spirit attempt to rise, breath ragged and resentful eyes watering.

"Let... Him go. Pitch." He hissed, teeth gritted with effort. That had been no ordinary arrow, he realised. It had left something inside when he had pulled it out. It throbbed and spasmed inside the muscle, growing and leeching away his energy, but he couldn't worry about it right now when his friend was in such dire peril.

"Now now, Jack: where would the be the fun in that? To set all of the pieces out only to never start the game, that would be such a waste... I've only just begun to play with you, so let's take our little reunion elsewhere."

Hiccup's own eyes began to water as clouds of shimmering obsidian grains swirled about them, desperately stretching his thin fingers out for Jack's, tangling them in the last moment before they were engulfed in the most absolute and complete blackness he'd ever experienced.

Xx

Travelling via the black sand, in a word, was desolate. There was an unnerving absence of your primary senses, but what it left behind was the clammy coldness and most importantly, the fear of the unknown depths within. A thousand unseen hands skittered across Hiccup's flesh as he screamed soundlessly, down his back, across limbs and belly, up his face. The only place they didn't seem to crawl was on his left hand, where an icy vise had taken grip instead, unshaken and firm. The cold numbness of his fingers, in some corner of Hiccup's soul, was a pinprick of hope in the suffocating lack of anything else.

He tumbled for what seemed like an eternity, not unlike yesterday, out riding Toothless when Jack pulled that nasty trick on him. Or had it been the day before? Did it ever occur at all? Now who was talking, was it his own mind?_ Who was he, anyway?_

Time was relative and the boy decided that he had been there so long that it would be the correct time to start forgetting things, most things, everything...

Until a cold, hard slam to the ground reminded him of exactly who he was, what had happened and why he should be very scared right now. The grip on his hand was no longer there, forcing the boy to crack his eyelids open and look around, spotting a familiar platinum haired teenager sprawled out just metres away, crook thankfully still in hand. An astonished yet grateful laugh bubbled its way up from his parched throat and for a moment things had finally started to improve, but only for a moment. Like a karmic back hand, the grip around his neck returned and wrenched him to his feet as Jack started to peel his way off the ground, leaning heavily on his crook.

"Still with us, I see," crooned Mara (whom Jack had identified as 'Pitch') next to his cheek, the Nightmare king's hand moved to pin the boy's wrists behind his back to cut off any escape, not that Hiccup knew where they were.

His eyes had adjusted to the darkness during his trip into the void and as a result he could pick out the outlines of bare branched trees, static wooden skeletons in the deadly silent air. The ground was lighter, looking like snow, but solid, so it had to be ice. Odd, this didn't seem to be any kind of battle ground: if anything, Jack had the advantage here since he was in his element. What was Pitch up to?

"Brings back memories, doesn't it, Frost?"

The Nightmare king had a voice like velvet that was almost charming, but beneath it the boy could hear the malice, repressed rage and just a hint of sadness. The young man managed to stand straight now and kept his swaying to a minimum, eyeing Pitch hesitantly.

"I-I don't know what you're talking about..." He lied, badly. Hiccup could see a bead of sweat travel down his brow, but it didn't freeze. Instead, it left a silty trail, looking horrendously grubby against the young man's pale skin. He rolled his shoulder back in discomfort and couldn't suppress a groan.

"That arrow, what have you done to me?" He rasped, blue eyes gleaming with fury. Pitch chuckled, a rich, smooth sound emanating from the depths of his chest.

"I merely stirred something that existed inside you already, gave it a nudge, so to speak. It's just bubbling to the surface. " Hiccup looked over his shoulder to glare at Pitch, meeting the golden glare and scowling.

"Whatever you did, Jack will beat it! He has all of Berk behind him now. You can't win, fear doesn't exist here!" The little Viking tried, entire body tensed in determination, but Pitch merely raised his hairless brow.

"Come now, Hiccup. You're a worse liar than he is. While it's true that most of your tribe are too stupid to be afraid, it doesn't mean that all of them are immune to fear. Tell me, has the little voice been stronger recently? A bit more pessimistic, loud?"

Colour bled from the boy's face as the truth gradually dawned on him. Pitch grinned and mimicked Hiccup's voice exactly.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of. You feel my influence is because you're the only one who will listen to reason. The others don't understand that fear isn't weakness, it's necessary for survival." The Nightmare king took his impersonation further, shrinking and morphing until the boy saw a golden eyed, desaturated mirror image, smiling back at him in a way he didn't think his own face could.

"It never hurts to be cautious and it always pays to be prepared. Your father almost got your entire tribe killed because of his so-called bravery, but you... You only went into that battle because you had a plan, a firm notion that you could succeed, but you did it for the fear that your tribe would die: Valour had nothing to do with it."

The not-Hiccup had changed his grip now, turning the original to face him with clammy hands on his shoulders. Its eyebrows knotted and it spoke with a tone that oozed with sympathy and disappointment: pained, even.

"You never felt you belonged, always standing in someone's hulking shadow. They'll never accept you as one of them, they'll always peg you as weak and inferior because you value intelligence and consider the consequences of your actions before leaping blindly. Even your new friend over there thinks you're a coward."

Violently trembling now, Jack shook his head vigorously at the statement, screaming in rage at the smirking not-Hiccup. "Don't listen to him, Hiccup! You're not a coward, you ride dragons for Thor's sake! You headed an assault against an Armada," He sucked in a breath and coughed thickly, spluttering tar-like phlegm on the ice. "You took a chance by putting your faith in me... Don't give me a reason to doubt you."

"But he already does, you can hear it in his voice. Unlike him, I have no reason to lie." Purred not-Hiccup, golden eyes creasing in satisfaction as he laid a fine hand between his twin's shoulder blades. Jack was looking much worse for wear now, his glowing skin ashen with the dirty sweat that was running down his brow. The formerly pearly teeth were gritted in agony, stained like he'd been gargling motor oil. The boy shook his head and darted forward when Jack dropped back to his knees, breath rattling in his sticky throat. Hiccup got a whole three steps away before his own shadow snaked out in front and grabbed his ankles, pinning his feet to the ice.

"Jack, just hold on: you can fight it, we can fix this." cried the boy, struggling against his shadow with all of his might. The not-Hiccup sidled up on his left, tutting and shaking his head in disappointment. He raised a brow in his original's direction condescendingly and wrapped an arm around his waist, using his other to gesture at the fallen spirit before him.

"Did he tell you that his memory spans more than three centuries? That he holds the Moon in contempt for bringing him back to then abandon him? He is as alone and ostracized in this world as I am, but tries to hide his hatred for humans with stupid practical jokes and childish fantasies, dreaming of friends and acceptance he'll never have among mankind..."

"I. Don't. Hate. People." Choked out Jack, struggling to rise again. Blue eyes burned with rage under a curtain of matted hair plastered to his forehead. Hiccup flailed again, only to be pulled back, chin grabbed and forced to stare forward at his struggling friend.

"He is an ancient man in an adolescent's body. Time has made him bitter, his soul gnarled from centuries of isolation. Would you honestly retain an optimistic view of the world if all you ever endured was ignorance, hardship and pain? Think logically Hiccup, it doesn't happen."

"Well he obviously isn't a pansy about it." Spat Hiccup, wrenching his chin from his double's grip while simultaneously elbowing him in the gut, the look of surprise on his own not-face was priceless. He dove forward and skidded on his knees, finally within Jack's reach to try and help him up. He grasped one of Jack's arms and scrambled to his feet, dragging the withered spirit with him.

"Come on, we need to get you looked at." He made to run but the ice proved too slippery and he tripped, slamming hard into the white surface. Jack tried to grab him but his normally razor sharp reflexes were sluggish in his intoxicated state. Instead, he lost his balance and followed suit, stumbling but never hitting the ice. A lash of sand stopped that impact and instead dragged him like a rag doll across the lake, black tendril snaring his bare ankle, whipping him around and pounding him against the surface, leaving a dirty smear with each blow.

"Tsk tsk, boys: where on Earth are your manners?" Hissed the not-Hiccup with Pitch's voice.

The sounds of abuse forced him to his hands and knees. Hiccup gasped in terror and felt his eyes prickle when he saw the young man being beaten senseless, defenceless even with the crook in his

hand.

Pitch must have sensed the boy stand, because he stiffened, leaving Jack dangling in mid air. He turned, reverted back at last to his original form, regarding the little Viking disdainfully. Metallic eyes brimmed with disgust, anger and just a dash of sorrow.

"You were different, boy. Long ago, I thought this one was different, too. But during the Dream Wars, he insisted on siding with the other Guardians and saw to make it his personal, thankless mission to try and protect all children from me. All I ever try to do is provide them with what they need to survive by instilling _necessary_ fear."

"Liar, they fear _you_! Plaguing them with nightmares, turn them into shivering-" Started the dangling young man. Pitch flicked his hand, severing the tendril of black sand, dropping Jack unceremoniously to the harsh ice with a graceless moan.

He continued his reverie, punctuating his sentences with lashes across the Frost Spirit's back.

"Pitch, no, stop!" Cried Hiccup, but his beseeches went unheard.

"I was given a job to do by our mutual 'friend', Frost! Then he betrayed me and made_ me_ the villain. He did the same to you, we are kindred spirits whose powers flow from the same spring. Where are your Guardian 'friends' now, when you need them the most?_ Nowhere!_" Pitch screamed at the young man who was gasping at his feet.

"Stop it, please!"

Suddenly, a hard, cold object hit him in the back of the neck, causing the man to return his attention to a now distraught Hiccup, second snowball in hand. His cheeks were red and he instinctively dropped the ball upon seeing he had the Villain's attention, dragging a sleeve across hastily his nose.

"Please, don't hurt him any more. He needs help... I'm begging you." He clutched his hands to his chest, bent pleadingly. "Just let me help him, he's sick." The boy bowed further, trembling with the effort of containing his sobs. _He wouldn't cry, Vikings didn't cry, plus the Snow Cone would laugh at him later for getting so worked up..._

He looked up at the broken Jack, a tiny yelp escaping his lips._ Oh Gods, he's a wreck. Why would anyone do that...?_ The internal war against his tear ducts was lost. The tears flowed freely now, making Jack's own eyes sting at the sight.

Pitch wouldn't show mercy, he didn't know the definition anymore. Instead, Jack watched helplessly from the floor as the Nightmare king silently drifted over to Hiccup, who was fighting to control himself and reached out to soothingly push his hair back. The black tendril darted out and whipped Jack across the jaw, making him roll away with blunt force when he tried to claw forwards.

Hiccup jumped at the lash and gazed up at Pitch with red rimmed eyes: the man's face knotted with pity, as if he saw something he recognized from long ago.

"My dear Hiccup," he breathed softly, taking one of his hands gently "I know you want to think you have a hope to persuade me and change his fate on your terms, but you really don't: Thankfully, you can still play a role in his future..." A crack spread beneath the boy's metal foot "By providing me with leverage."

* * *

><p> Soooo, lopsided Power struggle, but there is a cause in that Jack is leaking unholy quantities of poisonous, icky stuff and Hiccup is trying to take on what is essentially a
****_God_****_._**

_A portrait of "Mara" Pitch as he appears here is now on the "BerktoBurgess" tumblr. _

As ever, read, review and/or critique as much as you like, I really enjoy getting feedback from you lovely lot! :D

Thanks for all your support!

Q.G. xx

18. Chapter 18: Jack in Black

**Notes: ... This won't be as fun as the title.**

**Recommend listening to "Permafrost" by Lustmord for this chapter. On second thought, I'd keep the "Purifying Flames" album handy for the next few...**

* * *

><p>The silver spider web spread beneath Hiccup's prosthetic foot at an alarming rate, despite his efforts to stay deadly still. The boy even resisted breathing too heavily but it didn't slow the progression. Meanwhile, Pitch glided behind the him, leading him around by the hand he still hadn't released. The crunching below quickened and then abruptly stopped when Pitch did.<p>

Jack rolled over and gasped. His heart leapt into his mouth when he saw the fractured ice underneath his friend's feet, while the Nightmare king stood weightlessly behind the slight boy and couldn't hold back a dry sob. The young man coughed up yet more tar-like mucus, but pushed himself up onto his hands, sweating profusely as the pain in his shoulder tore through the muscles of his chest. Trembling, he tightened the grip on his crook, concentrating the cold into his body to try and sooth the burning sensation with some effect.

"You can't do this, Pitch. It has nothing to do with him." He rasped, beseechingly holding out his free palm. "I know what you want and you can have it if you free him." The young man lowered his arm, exhausted, but maintained eye contact with the Nightmare king. The tall man was unimpressed.

"And that would be...?"

Jack lifted his crook, desperately offering the bargaining chip. All that he thought he was, all his power and strength was contained with the gnarled, battered relic. He was willing to give it all away...

So he wouldn't have to see his own fate mirrored back at him. He didn't want to witness what his sister did all those years ago.

Pitch sneered. "What use is that toy to me?" Jack blanked, panting with effort to stay upright.

"Jack, the staff by itself is useless. I can't believe you never figured out that it was just a conduit for the power you have, a focus if you will..." The man shook his head slowly while Hiccup let out the breath he'd been holding to remain stock still. The cracks expanded again. Jack couldn't contain a yell of horror, grainy tears sporadically pouring down his filthy face.

"All right!" He cried, eyes wild. "Then what do you want? Anything: I'll give you anything, just please don't let this happen again!"

As Pitch mockingly hummed in thought, Hiccup gazed at his broken friend who was almost unrecognisable now, save for the vivid blue eyes and apparently useless crook. He doubted that anyone had ever really openly wept for him, never mind sacrificing the key to what they thought was the root of their being to save his life: he couldn't let the Winter Spirit suffer any more on his part, he couldn't allow him to offer anything else of great power in exchange for his comparatively meagre existence. The boy swallowed hard.

"Jack, you don't have to-"

"Be quiet, Hiccup." Ordered Jack sharply, shocking Hiccup into obeying him. "Pitch, what can I offer you to make sure he'll go free? Name it."

"You."

There was silence on the lake as the unwanted answer lingered awkwardly between the trio.

"How do you mean?"

"I mean I want you to stop fighting what's already there. At heart we're brothers: All of the darkness that is leaking from you now isn't from the arrow's point, the head merely punctured your own supply and it's now escaping, released after all the time you spent trying to deny your true nature. What makes a better combination than dark and cold? With your services, it would be spectacular..." The Nightmare king was practically gleeful now, apparently lost in his own little monologue.

"Could you imagine the possibilities? We could rule these mortals, freeze their lands, blot out their sun and force them to obey our every command, give them reason to fear the Dark Winters once more. We could even silence the Man in the Moon. We would be doing them a favour, Jack: Fear instils obedience and obedience inspires caution. There would be more 'Hiccups' in these lands, more mortals who would

value their own and each other's lives enough to not blindly run into death traps left right and centre! They could excel as a race, progress..."

"Only as far as you'd let us." Muttered Hiccup, quietly simmering in Pitch's grip. The God regarded the pathetic mortal sharply, and steeped his tone in acid.

"Couldn't hear you there, _ speak up, boy_."

"Our development would only continue as long as you willed it. Creativity didn't blossom in the dark ages, that's why they were named so: believe me, I don't even think we're out of the woods yet where _we_ are." Boldness was not exactly a positive trait to display as a hostage, but Hiccup couldn't remain silent in the wake of such a fundamentally grave insult to him and humans in general.

The tall man rolled his golden eyes and sighed, already regretting keeping the precocious child alive _this_ long. He peeled back his lips to snarl with those terrible teeth, immediately dehydrating the little Viking's throat.

"Well, unfortunately this situation is out of your delicate little hands: It's up to your so-called chum over there. Jack, we need a decision, this ice is beginning to look a little _thin_. Surrender and serve me during my venture, or watch our little Haddock here take a dip in the lake._ Your choice_."

"Listen to me, Jack: I'll be fine! Just get away and help the others!"

"You promise he'll be released?" Challenged Jack, doing his best to ignore Hiccup's protest.

"Cross my heart, you have my word that he will be let go." Pitch purred, briefly miming an 'X' over his sternum.

The pale, bedraggled young man sat silently for a moment, apparently contemplating his position. It took less than six seconds.

"You win. I submit to your conditions and I will promise to serve you as long as you hold up your end." Jack gave Hiccup a soft, earnest smile. "It'll all be OK, I promise."

The human paused, then nodded meekly, returning the smile earnestly.

"I trust you."

Pitch snapped his fingers to seal the deal. "Done."

A shocking contraction racked Jack's shoulders as he allowed the infection to consume him from the inside out, starting with the glow flickering and fleeing from his skin, an awful sallow grey taking its place. Doubled over, his hair darkened from silver to charcoal, erasing all the lustre as the shine receded to a dull matte. He fell gasping onto his side, the frost on his person became sooty and dark, flecked with the dreaded gleam of black sand. As he squeezed his eyes shut, the infection proceeded to leach any colour from of the clothes he was wearing, leaving him washed out and even more drained than

before... And throughout this process, he remained perfectly silent, afraid that any show of weakness that could goad Pitch into reconsidering his promise.

This did not mean that the transformation wasn't utter agony, as if his internal organs were boiling and his blood was replaced with cold lightning, oily rivulets pumping out of his pores.

"...!"

Succumbed with shock, Jack writhed for a few moments, plagued with convulsions until the spasms died down and the panting young man flopped in exhaustion, spread eagled on the ice. A pool of dark, acrid smelling fluid puddled where he lay, but the transformation was finished at last.

The pain eventually ebbed away after a personal eternity and Jack's muscles felt oddly rejuvenated, buzzing with a new found energy source. He stretched his limbs experimentally as he stood, feeling reborn for the second time. When the dizziness passed, he finally cracked open his new, orange eyes.

He picked up his crook instinctively, instantly encasing the shaft in dull frost and swung it over his healthy shoulder. The ice beneath his feet darkened and power emanated from his skin rather than his crook, which was an odd sensation in itself. Upon seeing Pitch, Jack respectfully (but begrudgingly) stooped, ready to make his new master honour his promise.

"All right, Pitch. I kept my side of the bargain, now let Hiccup go."

The Viking felt the clammy fingers loosen, and with his heart pounding in revelation he neglected to breathe in.

"As you wish." The web finally shattered completely and fell away beneath the boy when Pitch let go of his hand. A gasp. A startled yell from that freckled face and he was under faster than Jack could even blink.

"_No...!_"

The spirit had no time to think, automatically propelling himself towards the hole in an instant, reaching into the depths...

Only for them to freeze over from the merest graze of his fingers. An ugly, grey circle stood between himself and the only boy who had ever truly trusted him drifting to a watery grave. The young man struck the ice with his elbow, but the contact only reinforced the ice over the hole, as well as the surrounding surface. His heart dropped as he realized that his new found power was as unruly as it was potent. Jack shot Pitch a truly murderous glare, teeth bared.

"Pitch, What have you _done_?!"

"Exactly as I said I would. It's your mistake if you neglected to specify a time and place for his release."

Beneath him he could feel a pounding, a good metre away from where the boy had entered. The winter spirit frantically summoned the wind

to blow any snow and debris off of the lake's top layer, peeking through the ice to try and spot the little Viking's beating fists. A flash of white fur caught Jack's orange eye and he slid over with his staff, determined to shatter the thick, frozen barrier. As soon as he stood on top though, his magic seeped through his feet and the repeated smashes with his staff only served to make the ice thicker, though not thick enough to completely eradicate the struggling shape beneath. A pale palm pressed against the divide, like a child's hand on one side of a window. Jack knew that with his powers in this dreaded state he hadn't a hope for freeing the poor soul underneath.

Tears ran down his nose. The young man's knees buckled and he slumped on to his elbows, approximately facing the dying boy below him. He placed his own grey hand over Hiccup's and pressed his forehead to the ice that progressively thickened under his touch, defeated, breathing the only words he could only think to say:

Words that wouldn't change the situation, but words he wished had been said to Jokul Overlandson when he was sinking helplessly to the same freezing demise over three centuries ago to sooth the inevitable panic.

It's not your fault.

It'll be all right.

I can't tell you how special you are.

I tried to save you.

_I did my best. _

But it wasn't good enough.

You are so brave.

You made me so happy.

I am so sorry...

The little blurry hand fell away, sinking into the depths. The pain Jack endured earlier was a tickle compared to what he felt now, when his heart finally shattered in grief. He collapsed with ugly, hopeless sobs, lips grazing the cruel ice.

"Forgive me."

* * *

><p>Yes, Mara really __**would**__** hurt a child. **_

_**Um. Didn't enjoy writing this one so much, since a childhood experience lead me to become the strongest swimmer I could through
fear****._

**(Guess Pitch DID have a point- *Shot*)**

_**Thanks for reading. Feel free to ask questions. Reviews and

critiques are much obliged.**_

**Q.G. Xx**

19. Chapter 19: Descend, Deduce, Despair

**Note: Drowning is not a nice way to go, but if you're cold enough or swallowed water, the effects are said to be euphoric, trance inducing or enlightening.**

**(This is probably not true, but there you go.)**

* * *

><p>Strangely enough, drowning was not a sensation Hiccup was unfamiliar with. When he had dived to try and save Toothless from the wooden stocks in the battle against the Green Death, the boy had unfortunately run out of strength and oxygen before he could free the dragon. Thankfully his Father had been there to save him.<p>

Sadly, he wasn't here_ now_.

It was even darker beneath the ice, which Hiccup had not previously thought possible, but when the only thing he saw was the faint, orange light of what he gleaned were Jack's eyes paired with repeated thumps through the rapidly thickening barrier, the boy upgraded his situation from life threatening to outright hopeless.

Of course Pitch had known this would happen. He was just one of those guys, the boy pondered, noticing his limbs finally beginning to turn numb as he pushed against the ice. Pitch was a sneaky sort but with cleverness to back it up, the kind where you could plan eighteen steps ahead but he'd foil you by the third on a slow day. Hiccup supposed that kind of wisdom came with eons walking the mortal plane, so proportionally it really wasn't that impressive in the end. His arm wouldn't respond any more and the palm fell away from the ice and what he imagined to be Jack's mirrored gesture, finally losing his natural buoyancy at last.

If he had thought he could escape at this point, he would have shed the white elk furs around his shoulders to reduce the weight, but it seemed pointless now. He hadn't a prayer of finding his entry hole, the breath he'd been holding was about ready to escape and Jack Frost (or 'Jack Black-Ice' or whatever ridiculous moniker Pitch would undoubtedly dub him with) was unwilling and/or unable to rescue him.

Hiccup decided that based on his experience of Jack, the situation had to lean towards the latter: Sure, Pitch had released Jack's inner darkness, but this didn't necessarily mean that he had become evil, too. Heck, he'd tried to get the Nightmare King to honour his promise before surrendering to bleak, unending servitude so his morals were definitely in the right place. Hiccup's relationship with Toothless could attest to the fact that dark and fierce didn't automatically mean malicious or cruel, but in Pitch's case it seemed to be an accurate stereotype.

The boy released his air in a much needed sigh, bubbles funnelling through his lips as his head starting to swim, but he fought it with

every inch of himself, determined not to leave this world with too many mental loose ends. Thankfully, the chattering of his teeth kept him conscious for the moment.

Now where was he? Ah yes.

So Jack wasn't evil, but he really should have set more specific conditions for Hiccup's release. Trust the slush head to skip over the fine details, but it couldn't be helped now, of course.

The threads connected about Jack's aversion to this particular fate when the tears Hiccup witnessed came with a look of remembrance. Being a Viking, he had seen it a few times during the aftermath of old dragon raids, and when warriors would set pyres for their fallen brethren it came in two varieties: when someone had seen somebody else expire and when someone had almost expired themselves in the same way. He figured that since Jack was indeed a spirit, he must have died at some point, and due to the fact that no children in his village had suffered a fate like this in living memory, he must have been a victim of this _particular_ tragedy.

Hm. So this is how Jack went. For someone with his rambunctious nature, this end didn't seem fitting. But given his _skill set_, it could hardly have been any other way.

Inhaling a lung full of water, the boy knew his time was almost up, as it wouldn't be long before his body went into complete shock and then, into oblivion. There was one last question he had to answer before his brain was flooded with nothingness... Why the_ Berserkers?_

Unfortunately, the question would remain unanswered at that moment because Hiccup's higher cognitive activity abruptly, prematurely and unceremoniously ground to a halt.

Xx

History has a nasty way of repeating itself, regardless of what we might try to do to change it.

And now Jack Frost knew this fact exceedingly well as he shuddered in convulsive lamentations, prone atop the desolate ice, attempting to fold in on himself in anguish: He just wanted to retreat somewhere and forget how to feel. His fractured heart ached for the boy that had now undoubtedly drifted to the lake's bed, alone and unseeing for the passed few minutes. The tears didn't seem to want to slow down at all, even as his bruised fists stopped beating against the glacial paving at last.

"He wasn't part of this,_ any_ of it." He whispered eventually, voice thick with abject misery.

The Nightmare King had to concentrate with every fibre of himself to stop his absolute pleasure at the sight before him from being broadcast in his body language, but this despair was like nectar, and he wanted to savour every last lick.

So he said nothing for a moment, but casually glided behind the boy, sympathy plastered upon his features. He leant down and wrapped his fingers around the young man's shaking shoulder, gracefully balanced

on his haunches. Jack drew into himself even more at the touch and sniffed.

"You've done enough, just... Get away._ Please_. "

"I can't say anything you'll believe, nor anything that will bring you comfort... But I am telling the truth when I say it is for the good of our overall design-

Sorrow transmuted to anger in an instant.

A wild arm knocked Pitch's hand away, Orange eyes flaring with rage, slowing the water that flowed from them. The Winter Spirit swung his staff and shot, flashes of cobalt blue and Copper red hitting the Nightmare King squarely in the chest.

"He was just a _child_! No plan should _ever_ involve taking the life of an innocent boy, it will _never_ be worth it, you _Devil_!"

Jack pounced and swiped Pitch across the jaw, sending the tall man stumbling but he managed to keep his footing. Jack rolled into a crouch and sprang, sparking his staff once more, only for the attack to be side stepped at the last second. Pitch scowled and retorted with a wave of black sand before another blow could be dealt, sending it crashing down on to Jack, binding him in rough chains while Pitch rounded and stepped over the struggling figure, grabbing the sides of his head and wrapping malicious grey fingers in his hair, yanked hard and made the captive cry out.

"A plan is never worth taking the life of an innocent boy, you say? Tell me, Jack, why do you think you _shared _that little Viking's fate all those centuries ago? Who has the authority to appoint new guardians, give them power, guide them to the light? Although I was there while it happened, I was _not_ the one pulling the strings."

Jack contorted and tried to bite Pitch, but the dark figure just pressed his knee into his prisoner's fine little throat, stunning him temporarily with a reflexive choking fit. He still thrashed like a demon, but shadows crept up his back, spine arching in revulsion at their presence. Even though his physiology had changed, Jack was still not immune to Pitch's horrendous abilities, and as a result goose flesh rose while his body became gradually paralysed with the petrification effect, where the shadows had settled upon his crawling skin.

Pitch wrenched Jack's head up a fraction, so he could whisper in his ear more comfortably.

"For his own selfish reasons, that mute little 'prince' _tested_ you by offering an impossible choice... And the only way to succeed was to surrender your own life." Pitch leant back to gauge the reaction to his harrowing statement.

The young man stopped his writhing, steadily meeting Pitch's unfaltering gaze. What this monster was saying couldn't be true, if it meant that...

His lip quivered.

"The Man in the Moon...? He was the one who took me away from my home, my family?"

His head shook itself involuntarily, all the while the dark man slid his hands to the boy's cheeks, shushing him in a manner that could be seen as soothing from anyone else, but not right now.

"He didn't speak to you for all this time because he couldn't stand the shame of addressing an adolescent he had helped murder. I was not there to assist in his plan, however: I was there to fulfill my duty. Even though you felt alone Jack, in the freezing depths, I was there in the dark when you struggled, unable to aid you, but never leaving your side for an instant..."

The young man wriggled less, finally resting his cheek in one of those spidery hands, too tired to fight. Sleepiness inexplicably and rapidly took tenacity's place.

"I was so _scared_." Sputtered Jack, lost in his reverie. "And I was _still_ for so long, but then the light came and I didn't feel so afraid." Pitch had called off the sand wisps now and pulled Jack to his chest, pushing stray black hairs back from the young man's forehead.

"Nothing but a _show_. The moon is heartless, desolate, incapable of providing any warmth or consolation."

Jack leaned into the contact like a child, drained by the revelations he'd had and in need of any comfort, even from the most unseemly source. As the young man nestled into the long fur of his great cloak, Pitch rocked gently, surprisingly well practised in the motion and continued his cruel unveiling of the truth. He bowed his head, lips brushing against Jack's hair as he spoke.

"It was all a ruse to get you on his side. He resurrected you with the belief that all darkness must be vanquished by the light, but you and I both know that the world requires a balance, that you always felt safer under the cover of night... That it was good to be alone with it. With me."

Silence followed for a few moments, neither being requiring to breathe but doing so out of force of habit, synchronised.

"You know, you're right," mumbled Jack eventually, eyes hooded in thought. "No one to judge, or chastise you. In all the time I've been around, you've easily been the most honest with me." The Nightmare king chuckled, a sad, soft sound that was laced with regret.

"And yet, in all this time we've been enemies. I never wanted to fight you, my boy, but others have thrust these warring roles upon us. Out of all of _them_, you were the only one I could see myself in."

A non committal hum was Jack's response, dozing listlessly in the lilting caress.

"It doesn't have to be that way though. I think we need each other, we can end our loneliness and isolation if we just stick together. My plan will make it so we are never ignored by anyone again..."

Jack's eye itched with an external irritation, so he languidly kneaded it with a knuckle, pulling it back to inspect the problem.

Sobriety hit him like an avalanche when specks of black dust gleamed darkly back.

That manipulative wretch. Pitch's seductive words only had an effect on him in conjunction with the dream sand making him placid. The embrace Jack was in suddenly felt akin to sitting in a nest of snakes, but he couldn't jump out just yet. Instead, he yawned and dreamily responded to the Nightmare king's true but now irrelevant spiel.

"I always knew that the Moon had something to hide, but he also showed me that I had something to prove."

"Really? What, pray tell, would that be?"

Striking like a cobra, the Winter Spirit pushed away as black ice cemented Pitch to the spot, a forced but cheeky signature smirk back in place. The Nightmare king struggled with all his might, but not fast enough to stop Jack taking off and rocketing towards the clouds with unbeatable velocity. He knew that Pitch could hear him through the darkness even at this distance and continued.

"He showed me that I would sacrifice everything to save those I love, that I am worthy of the title 'Guardian'," He raised his crook high into the air, flooding it with energy to the point that the wood groaned to contain it. "I will never forgive you for what you've done to Hiccup, not even after countless eons when this planet is dust. So if you thought you could get me on your side with a sob story and a lullaby, you've got another thing coming, Monster! I won't let all of this be for _nothing_..."

The charge was complete and Jack thrust his crook in front of him, carefully taking aim.

"Now, if you don't mind, I think it's time for a reunion with my _maker._"

Pitch had slithered out of his restraints just in time to see an outburst of blue and orange parting the clouds with a dizzying array of sparks, and the dense veil was punctured, allowing moonbeams to tunnel through the blackness and illuminate the starry sky once more.

Instantly, the Nightmare king felt a great weight upon him and turned from the bright entity, mustering his power to furiously retreat into the shadowy trees.

* * *

><p>Oh ho ho, you thought this was over? Not by a long shot. Fight the Power!_

**Of course, reads, reviews, questions and critiques are amazing to receive so I get a better idea of how the story is progressing from a reader standpoint.**

**We've bit the bedrock, so the only way to climb is up. Stay tuned!**

**Q.G. Xx**

20. Chapter 20: Request, Rise, Repair

**Note: It is a well known fact that the moon itself is not a creator of light, but is instead a reflector, receiving its light from the Sun and refracting it to Earth. The moon could not spread its rays or shine any light without the help of its celestial Older Sibling.**

* * *

><p>Jack had returned to the lake after an hour clearing away his awful handiwork, whipping around to catch sight of Pitch but finding no one he looked up at the white behemoth he'd released from the confines of the thick clouds. A cold silence was the only answer he'd ever received to any of his questions and he wasn't expecting one now, but that was all right, just as long as he was listening. Because the activity was over, the ache in his chest returned, threateningly stinging Jack's eyes with grief, but to honour Hiccup (who would always want things to get done) he tried to partition the sadness inside to a later, less civilisation threatening time.

The Winter Spirit took a deep breath and pushed an ashy hand through his still (disappointingly) dark hair. He groaned slightly, the sadness returned as he stared at the great, looming disc.

"Over the years I've asked you a lot of things: Why I was chosen for this, why I was made, why I had to leave my family, why no one believed in me. but no more questions... Just a wish." His orange eyes shone and fat, sooty tears rolled down his nose, finally beginning to freeze when they met his skin.

"If I could only wish you could change what happened to him. None of this was meant to even... A-And he has too much to offer the world for it to end this way, so please..." The young man didn't finish, feeling enough had been said as he irately chipped the dirty icicles from the tip of his nose and under his chin. After the usual reply, he sighed in resignation and coughed up a little sleet before pivoting on a foot to search the forest for the fleeing Nightmare King.

Xx

He'd been drifting for a while now. Thinking had long since passed, as had the pain in his lungs and he last thing he remembered was a strangely warm feeling when he had wrapped the white furs around his shoulders, utilising the last of his strength.

This plane was neutrality incarnate: not dark or light, warm or cool, fluid or solid. It simply was. Somewhere. Maybe. If the boy had the tangibility to knead his brow he would have, but the nature of this place left him doubting he had a body at all. It would have been infuriating if any chemical reactions were occurring in a fully corporeal brain. Apparently he still had eyelids and he used them,

shutting out the bland place in favour of the comfortingly dark world behind the fine skin. He could think now, but lethargically. He knew that his body had stopped respiring and was probably floating aimlessly at the bottom of the lake, out of the reach of his people for any kind of burial or proper funeral rites. That may have been why he was stuck in this purgatory prison for the moment.

It was probably better that way, he inwardly sighed, the people of his village had enough to worry about without having to build a longboat to set on fire. His father would be upset, along with Gobber. His flight squad would probably be pretty sad, but he knew Astrid would do her level best to take care of Toothless, who would probably suffer the most.

And what about Jack? Would he be there, saying empty words of comfort, would he admit that his presence was partially to blame for Hiccup's premature departure? The boy didn't blame him, but the villagers certainly would. Not that it would matter any more, since he was now a slave to the Nightmare King, thoroughly because of Hiccup's presence... How was he dealing with Hiccup's demise? So far, he was the only one who knew...

A spasm in his left hand caught the boy's attention, followed by pins and needles like tiny icicle acupuncture all over his body. He peeled his eyelids back to find himself no longer in the neutral place. Instead, water flooded into his nose and ears, but it didn't hurt any longer. It was as if he had been graced with a kiss of life and while it was still uncomfortable, it was no longer unbearable. The boy's arm instinctively reached ahead, eyes blurringly observing the light streaming through his fine fingers. A round, white disc rippled above, illuminating the water around him to a calming teal. Two little dark spots thumped against the ice covering the lake, as if someone had landed on top of it.

Must be Jack, Hiccup surmised with surprise, but if it was him, then where was Pitch?

Natural buoyancy returned to his thin body, raising the boy smoothly towards the barrier, causing him to brace for impact.

All the while, the disc grew brighter like a great, white solar flare and Hiccup had to shut his eyes to shield them from the almost blinding rays. Even behind his lids, he could feel his eyeballs tingle and the roots of his hair prickled as if the follicles were experiencing isolated sun burn.

Xx

The footfall barely landed when a cracking sound made his heart skip a beat. He checked beneath himself, but the ice was especially solid. The cracking swelled into a splintering cacophony and the Winter spirit spun to face the origin. The stone-like ice crunched heavily as it parted a few feet away, but eventually the tip of a round nose was visible as it rose up along with the rest of a skinny, dripping (but strangely steaming) body. The previously auburn hair sopped from the boy's scalp, the most intriguing colour Jack had ever witnessed: A blazing strawberry blonde graced his crown, strewn with a myriad of oranges, yellows, silvers and even the odd pink.

"No way..." Gasp'd Jack in amazement, "You actually did as I

asked?"

The boy in the unnaturally bright moonbeam's cradle was still. But the bough broke suddenly and Jack skidded forwards to seal the ice, and to catch the boy, stop him from tripping with his mismatched feet: It wouldn't have mattered, since his legs didn't attempt to support him in the first place. Quickly laying Hiccup down, Jack leant over and pressed his ear to the little chest, desperately listening for any kind of murmur.

"I know you're there, lizard lips, so wake up." There was an awkward silence when Hiccup failed to twitch, which made Jack's habitually beating heart leap into his mouth.

"Oh come on! You didn't float up from your watery _grave_ to wimp out now!" He urgently shook the boy's thin shoulders, hoping to force some activity into the thin, limp limbs.

"Breathe, damn it!"

An impulse spurred Jack to slap Hiccup across the cheek , as if the brash action would stimulate the boy's urge to fight back.

"Breathe!"

For a beat there was nothing, until an actual hiccup made the Viking convulse and spew water violently, making the frost spirit's heart dance. He scuttled back, surprised but ecstatic.

"I never thought I'd ever be so happy to see somebody choke. Let's make sure it doesn't continue though..." He muttered, gingerly lifting the gasping boy into his chilly arms to rest him against his shoulder. Jack tucked his friend's peculiar new hair behind his ears and rubbed a hand briskly against Hiccup's bicep to try and promote some circulation into the apparently undamaged limb.

Damp eyelashes fluttered and Hiccup's pale eyes cracked open, watering upon contact with light and dry air.

"Hiccup, are you with me?" He heard a pensive young man whisper through the fog of his brain, familiar, friendly.

The muddled Viking blearily tried to focus on the voice's owner. A scrubbing motion was stimulating the blood in his arm while the person who held him propped up his back, preventing him from flopping like an infant while the world became less comparable to a carousel ride.

"Uh, present... Mostly?" The boy's throat felt oddly parched but it was the least of his worries: a twinge of remembrance made him jerk forward to check his leg with a clumsy grope.

He still had a good one left, he thought giddily, going limp with a tiny nervous laugh. Jack blinked again to make sure that he (perhaps _unlike_ his friend) wasn't hallucinating from exhaustion.

The Hiccup he held right now was damp, confused and literally off-colour, but definitely there... Definitely _his_ Hiccup, albeit with a few superficial tweaks, but he was hardly in a position to

judge.

"You're really here..." Jack muttered, still thunderstruck by the fantastic concept.

"Where else would I be, snow cone?"

When those sea foam eyes sharpened with recognition and bloodless lips pulled into a grateful grin, Jack Frost found himself mirroring it, instinctively bundling the wet boy into a tight bear hug. The captive Hiccup started to feel awfully queasy with the pressure on his stomach. He urgently wriggled, signalling for Jack to release him before...

"I'm glad to see you too, b-but if you could-just-oh- Oof-"

The wave of nausea crested and he pushed away from Jack just in time to roll over and retch, expelling a near gallon of lake water along with a few tiny, flapping fish. Breathlessly wiping his mouth on his sleeve, the boy tried to ease his perturbed friend with a shaky thumbs up, but his hand weakly drooped down, only to be caught in Jack's.

"Take it easy, or they'll be calling you 'Fish Legs'."

Hiccup wheezed a dry chuckle but took back his hand, placing it on the ice with conviction. He pushed hard and with Jack's help rose to his feet, doubled over while he recovered his balance.

He eventually straightened and breathed deeply for a few moments, glad to have the opportunity to do so again. Jack cautiously sidled back over and cautiously wrapped his arms around the hopefully un-waterlogged Hiccup.

"It's OK, I'm better now."

A few moments later the boy could feel the shuddering breaths in Jack's chest and heard a few badly concealed sniffs. The boy's heart melted and wrapped his own arms as well as he could around his friend, squeezing firmly.

"I thought I'd lost you." Jack eventually muttered horsely into Hiccup's ear, to get a snigger in his shoulder as response.

"I'm an expert at being 'un-losable'. Just ask my village: They've tried many times."

They stayed in contented silence for a moment, both still reeling from the exceedingly strange yet absolutely miraculous turn of events.

They parted eventually and when they did, the same wicked glint in the Frost Spirit's different eyes had returned, and the glow of mischief bloomed under the grime on Jack's face. He whistled mock awe.

"I thought the moon did a number on me, but he really outdid himself with you, Sunshine."

"...What?"

* * *

><p>The Dork knight rises, since leaving him forever alone at the bottom of a freezing lake was never going to stay in the fic-forecast. Sorry about the panic, folks. Jack is still in black, just to clear it up. _

**So how are you liking this? Reads, reviews and critiques are always welcome, or feel free to prop me a PM with questions or anything else. **

**Plus: Over 9000 views, guys, you're all EPIC!**

**Q.G. Xx**

21. Chapter 21: Wicked Root

**Note: A trebuchet is a medieval catapult. The rhyme below is a traditionally English phrase that is used to indicate possible bad weather. Sometimes 'Shepherd' is replaced with 'Sailor'. **

* * *

><p>Red Sky at Night, Shepherd's Delight: Red Sky at Morning, Shepherd's warning._

Bewildered, Hiccup frowned and ran a hand through his bangs, pushing one forward for inspection. He paled further.

"I'm... Orangey... Pinky...Yellow? Sweet Freya, my hair has most of the colour scared out of it!" Jack shrugged, darkly yet shamelessly amused.

"Well, you had quite a shock, drowning and everything. It's way up there in the traumatic event rankings.. Plus I think that shade is what they call 'Strawberry blonde'." Not even attempting mask his fun, he added "You should be happy. It's pretty rare."

The boy pulled out the tiny knife he kept in his belt and inspected his face in the blade, turning it this way and that for a better look.

"Oh no... No, no,_ no_..."

The freckles stood out more starkly than before, but when he met own gaze, his mouth fell open, aghast... This was terrible, he couldn't face his Father like this. Or his peers: The former for the fear, the latter for the ridicule. It wasn't something he could easily hide, like a bruise or a skinned knee. There had to be something he could do to fix this, he always had a plan.

"For Tyr's sake, as if I don't stick out enough _already_? This is just the 'Frosting' on the bun." He shot sideways at the not so subtlety sniggering Sprite.

A hat, maybe?

"_Please_ tell me this isn't permanent: My eyes, they're all..."

Pale and _creepy_." Hiccup felt the withering look before he saw it and wilted.

"Eh-heh. Not that strange eye colours are creepy... Oh, I don't time to deal with this now! Forget it. I have bigger issues, like the fact I apparently just came back from_ Hel_."

He was mostly dry now, growing more and more conscious of his now familiar surroundings in the new light. He regarded his hands, exceedingly white with finger tips looking a touch bruised.

Had he really died?, thought Hiccup, both terrified and fascinated. Oddly, his pulse was present when he checked it to test his assumption.

Perhaps he'd assumed too much.

He pressed his ear flush against Jack's sternum, who was a tad unnerved in return. There was a long silence, until a startled beating began, slow and unsteady as if it had been a while since it had jerked into action.

"What are you-?"

"You're dead, right?" The young man nodded, raising an irked, twitching brow.

"If you mean I drowned... Then yeah. But I exist and I_ live,_ somehow. The moon brought us back, me as a some kind of ghost... But you? I'm not so sure, yet."

He looked up at their 'saviour', apparently considering something.

"You were only under for a few hours, but I was down there for _days_. He could very well have resurrected you _fully_."

The boy checked his limbs carefully, actually starting to feel a little warmth wheedle through them now. It seemed like Jack's hypothesis was on the doubloons.

"That's amazing," breathed Hiccup, astonished at his luck. "How did you know you were down there for so long?"

"The night before I went under, the moon was waxing. I had to be there at least a week before it would have been full... Like tonight." Jack answered smoothly, smug at his own deduction.

Hiccup gave an impressed nod, but then his cheer dissipated at a sudden, stinging notion. Drooping a bit and glancing at his feet uncomfortably, he scratched a little pattern into the ice with the toe of his prosthetic, trying to figure out how to phrase what he _really_ wanted to ask without seeming like a heartless berk.

"It's cool that I'm still here at all, but one thing still bothers me, and I obviously don't hold anything against you but..." He twiddled his hair nervously, focussing on the bright strands instead of Jack, who was utterly bewildered.

Hiccup started, stopped, decided to wait until the timing was better,

which definitely wasn't within the next five seconds. He remembered that there was still a village to protect... And he'd been away for far too long.

"I did some thinking down there, but we've wasted too much time already, I'll fill you in when we've rested."

Jack shot him a quizzical frown, but shook it off, promptly gearing up for flight.

"Let's get going then. Hold on tight, iguana breath."

Crook in hand, Jack wrapped an arm around Hiccup's waist and the boy quickly laced his fingers behind the young man's neck, bracing himself as they rose from the ice and soared into the night air. It was almost blinding to Hiccup after the darkness he'd emerged from, but it felt different too, he felt different, not even feeling remotely cold in Jack's hold.

Fabric rippled in the breeze, breaking the silence and putting the boy at ease while they glided. Warm drafts ran up his sleeves and through his hair, greeting him like an old friend, providing a balm for the tension knotted in his muscles. A flush rose in Hiccup's freckled cheeks and he glowed contentedly as the gentle heat flowed through his bony limbs, lips drawing back into an involuntary, blissful smile.

"You're awfully toasty," commented Jack casually, sticking out his lip thoughtfully "Not the usual thing after someone drowns." He glanced down at the boy, who was rather red in the face. Feeling eyes on him, Hiccup returned the stare, absently nodding.

"Suppose it's not... Feeling a bit feverish actually."

The young man grimaced, orange eyes creasing in concern. "We can stop, if you want."

The boy shook his head firmly, sending the fair hair whipping wildly. Its brightness was terribly distracting. He irritably tried to blow the bangs out of his face with limited success.

"No, we have to make up for lost time and to get back to the village: Dawn's almost here and I don't know if the initial assault and the ice blockade have staved off the attack." He paused, remembering something else, and a slow terror started filling his face.

"Oh no... Toothless. Jack, he fell when we were taken! If at all possible please pull the lead out!"

Jack inclined his head in acknowledgement and picked up the pace as far as he could manage, which due to his recent transformation was really quite rapid.

Xx

The ships lingered in the far horizon, dormant, but far away. The ice blockade had held fast and waves lapped gently against it, undisturbed by the Berserker fleet. Violet and burgundy clouds had begun to sluggishly drift out from behind the sea and stars retired one by one to their nocturnal slumber. The moon remained, a white and

russet giant silently surveying the scene.

"All right, Jack, pull up your hood. We need to find Astrid and ask her about Toothless without grabbing too much attention."

Descending gently, the boys touched down behind a well on the edge of the village square, where the majority of the Vikings had decided to stay, huddled around occasional fire pits or eating, distracted.

Good.

The scattered riders were tending to their dragons, each looking exhausted and just a little miffed that their epic battle had barely. Astrid was seeing to Stormfly's reigns when Jack and Hiccup landed a few metres away, at least, she _thought_ it was them.

Jack Frost carefully dispatched his passenger and wearily tried smiling at the girl when she approached. He was almost unrecognisable, what was visible of his silver hair replaced with an intense shock of charcoal, his skin was dirty and grey with no sheen and his once cool eyes _burned_.

She stopped in her tracks, trying to hide her absolute astonishment, but it didn't last when she caught sight of Hiccup, who was trying to quickly pull the white furs atop his crown. She rushed to his side, grabbing the sides of his head. She stared into the once hazel eyes, brown turned to amber, forest green to raw jade. Her jaw dropped, soundlessly opening and closing while the boy shifted uncomfortably.

"Um, Astrid, do you mind letting go of my-"

"What. Happened. To. Your. HAIR?" She demanded, thunderstruck. The boys glanced at each other sidelong and then back at the warrior maiden. Hiccup cleared his throat.

"Uh, I _really_ _don't_ think you'd believe me if I told the truth..."

"Try me."

Other villagers had spotted them now, glancing at the trio and muttering to each other. Jack fought the urge to raise his crook but instead stepped closer to Hiccup, who was too distracted by Astrid to notice the dangerous whispers around them. The little Viking gritted his teeth desperately, wrenching the girl's vice like grip from his head using the entirety of his strength, but kept one hand cupped in his own for assurance. Jack urgently nudged Hiccup and cleared his throat thickly.

"We_ really_ _need_ to get out of the open. Like, asap." His voice was horse and the intense sun was rapidly approaching, glaringly bright in the Winter Spirit's strangely sensitive eyes.

"We're not going _anywhere_ until I get some answers." Shot Astrid back, but when she saw the sooty sweat trailing down his grey brow, she wavered. Hiccup scanned the villagers and returned his eyes to Astrid's, pleadingly.

"I have to find Toothless, Astrid... Show me he's all right and I'll tell you anything you want to know."

The warrior maiden hesitated, flicking between the bedraggled pair and a pang of pity thudded in her rib cage. She glanced down at the warm, bruised fingers tangled in her own and sighed, giving them a squeeze.

"You owe me for this... But all right. Toothless is safe, up at your place."

An axe gleamed on her back as she whipped around and motioned the boys to follow, who briskly complied.

"Your Dad is on the other side of the island, helping to set out your new trebuchets around the coast. He only left a little while ago so he shouldn't be back for hours. Hookfang caught Toothless when you guys disappeared, but other than being a little shaken, he's perfectly fine." She glanced over her shoulder, a wry smile curling her pink lips. "He doesn't need another tail, at least."

The trio scurried up the path to Stoick's porch, where Astrid pushed open the heavy wooden door to let the boys in. Glad to be inside, Hiccup slammed the door and took it off the latch, pressing his back against the planks and sighing. Jack drew back his hood nodded gratefully to the girl, who wouldn't stop staring at him.

After catching his breath, Hiccup darted between them and urgently jogged up the stairs to his room, frantically fumbling with his door handle and pushing it open a touch harder than he's intended, causing the door to slam into his desk, knocking off a few drawings and spilling a full bottle of ink. The container bounced, splashed and rolled away unnoticed as the boy rushed to the warm stone slab that Toothless was currently coiled up on, quietly purring as he slept.

The little Viking stood motionless as he silently scanned his friend for any injuries. Everything seemed intact and the dragon was sleeping like a kitten, blissfully unaware of the current disasters that faced Berk, or the horrors that he and Jack had endured the past night.

He was exceedingly grateful for that fact.

Hearing the pair approaching, Hiccup raised his hand to motion for quiet, but Astrid chuckled lightly, slapping a hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry about the noise, I fed him some of your dragon nip broth. He'll be out like a candle for a good couple of hours, ready for action by nightfall." The boy scratched behind Toothless' ear, treated to a contented growl from the depths of the dragon's slumber.

"Good job, Bud. You had be worried there, but I forgot how tough you are."

The sun had now started to filter thorough the sky light as it climbed higher into the rose coloured sky. The warrior maiden glanced up at the light, sighed and turned to the curiously bleached boy on her left.

"OK, so about your hair-"

Jack witnessed the scene and couldn't hold back a satisfied smile, resting his weary limbs on his crook, when something started to prickle. A shaft of sunlight slicing through the room's candlelight like butter. The yellow rays broke hard upon the Frost Spirit, who instantly felt like his organs were combusting, his flesh trying to retreat from his bones.

"AUUUGHHH!"

The scream of pain made the Vikings whip around on their heels, to a crumpled Jack, curled in on himself in a puddle of sun beams. The young man was practically smoking in the yellow light, dark tendrils curling and spiralling off his skin as he thrashed on the floor. He panted though gritted teeth, keening like a dog. Hiccup's heart skipped a beat.

He lurched forward and swung the furs off his shoulders, throwing them over the Sprite for protection, reached over the shaking mass and grabbed the crook that had fallen from its owner's grip. He rounded again, scanned his ceiling for the latch that held open the roof panel, quickly spotted it and with a deep bend of the knees leapt up, swinging the hook and sliding the mechanism that slammed the panel shut, an effective shield from the offending sun.

Awestruck, Astrid cast her wide eyes to the panting Hiccup, who was now dragging the moaning Jack over to his wooden bed, unceremoniously dropping him on top of the covers. He just finished lifting those bare feet up on to the frame when the little Viking spotted the maiden staring at him blankly.

Where on Earth had that come from? She pondered, doubting even she could jump that high.

"Astrid, I'm not being funny but could you please help? I need clean water and some rags." He pulled away the furs that covered the young man and prised away the hands that had clamped themselves over his sooty, contorted face. Shuddering, uneven breaths escaping his chest and the occasional convulsion arched his spine, forcing Hiccup to pin Jack's limbs by throwing his weight over the torso. He called over to the girl who had not yet been spurred into action.

"What are you waiting for, you know the stories, right? Think of Baldur, remember that even _Gods_ can die!" He ranted, wrestling with the young man under him. Exiting her trance, Astrid nodded briskly and charged through the door without another thought, incurring some clattering of pots and pans from downstairs.

Nonsense spewed from Jack's lips and his eyes lost their focus as his movements slowed suddenly, arms shakily wrapping around his ribs, nails planting themselves into the ashen skin. Hiccup stepped away briefly, withdrawing the dagger from his belt and rolling the suffering young man on to his side. He cut the jacket off at the Sprite's free shoulder, allowing access to his stained, sticky back. That was when the little Viking saw it: The black, oozing wound that secreted foul smelling, liquid darkness. Hiccup fought his gag reflex and instead chewed his lip, considering his next step.

Urgency resided where remorse should have been as the boy swiftly grabbed the back of the Sprite's shirt collar and slit a large gash in the fabric, peeling it away to reveal yet more symptoms of infection, manifested in spider- like webs that criss-crossed the once pale skin. It all seemed to stem from the shoulder, but what could be done about it?

He was a black smith, not a healer. Sure, he'd picked up a little here and there, but any kind of medical aid he could offer was rudimentary at best. And what about the physiology? Jack might not even be like a human in that sense: Perhaps it was a job for a witch doctor, Someone like Gothi? Maybe he should get her...

The whimper that escaped the trembling young man seemed human enough to pluck a single, sharp note on Hiccup's heart strings. The note sang: There's no time. Trust your instincts or he might not last.

That tore it. He'd do what he could. If it wasn't enough, he'd get help, disguise or no. But first...

There had to be a root to this problem, one that if extracted-

Root.

Ah. It couldn't be... Could it?

At that moment, Astrid clambered up the stairs with a sloshing pitcher and a bundle of torn cloth strips. She spotted Jack's black lattices and almost dropped both, but sobered up, jogging to Hiccup for instructions. The boy took the items with a small 'thanks', but didn't avert his gaze from the predicament before him.

"Well, what's the problem? Any ideas?" She queried, cautiously circling the Frost Spirit until she was in front of his unfocussed eyes.

"Just... One," He answered slowly, drenching and wringing a rag in his left hand. "On my signal, I need you to hold him as still as you can for me."

The girl eyed her friend doubtfully, but dutifully ignored her twitching fingers as she reached forward to grip Jack's dirty shoulders. He didn't react. "Can I ask why?"

"I need to try something crazy, " Replied Hiccup evenly, setting the pitcher on the floor and carefully stroking away the dirt surrounding the wound "Which, left unattended, could turn out to be quite stupid."

The skin was clear now, so the boy could clearly see what he was working with. Reaching inside his shirt for the little tool holster he kept there, he extracted a little pair of tweezers from their sheath and grazed his bedside table for.. Ah yes. There it was.

He hooked an odd contraption over the bridge of his nose and adjusted the telescopic barrel using a tiny dial on the side of the lens's canister. He shut his right eye and the world grew. The follicles on Jack's previously smooth back swelled in his vision, the wound now

more garish than ever, visibly festering under his scrutiny. The boy readied his tweezers, controlling his breathing to keep them as steady as possible while he looked for the 'root'.

"Come on, come on... Give me something to go at."

Before long, he found it, nestled deep within the sprite's flesh, much further than it should have been. The very tip of an ebony arrow head was lodged into the wall of the entry point (upon further magnification, it was grazing bone).

In... Out... In...Out...The breaths filled and fled his lungs, Hiccup's sturdy left hand could shame a stone.

"Astrid, I need you to hold on tight, now."

Unable to see the girl but hearing the rustle of movement, he moistened his lip with a flick of his tongue and held it between his teeth. The metal instrument grew warm, hot between his confident fingers.

Exhaling through his nose, Hiccup's tweezers struck with the precision of a cobra and entered the hole, pincerd the offending article firmly between the sharp metal points and was ready to be yanked.

A blood curdling yell came from Jack, who bucked and twisted so hard that even Astrid had a hard time anchoring him down. The young man was stronger than he looked, but so was the warrior maiden, so she gritted her teeth and pushed down with all her might, grunting with effort.

"Take it- Easy- Snowflake!"

That's it, he thought, Keep it up. At a girl...

Silently thanking her, Hiccup tried to steady the area with a spare open palm, held on to the arrow tip and twisted, drawing forth more cracked screams but actually working the evil little fragment loose, further, further...

Until it popped out like a splinter, shining darkly in the candle light. The boy actually toppled onto his backside with that final pull, lucky to still have the instrument in his grasp. He opened his right eye and removed his experimental lens, inspecting the arrow tip with his bare eyes... Until it began to melt his tweezers, dissolving the metal like salt in boiling water. The young man on the bed flopped back, breath strained, eyes flickering behind their lids. But the little Viking was too distracted by the possibly imminent loss of his fingers.

"HOLY-" The tweezers were dropped, sizzling on the floor until all that remained was a silvery splodge. What in Thor's name...? If a fragment that small did that to solid metal, what had it been doing to Jack's-

"Hiccup? I think... He might be getting better?" His attention snapped back to the present, glazed eyes blinking the scene back into focus. He rocked into a crouch, standing steadily and creeping over to the bed. Looking somewhat victorious, Astrid swept her flaxen

fringe back and offered a sincere smile, gesturing to the surprisingly calm body sprawled in the roughly woven blankets.

His chest rose and fell evenly now, apparently unfettered by the pain that had constricted it just minutes ago. Like before, a slowly expanding pool of dark ooze soaked into the fabric, leaking from the Sprite's pores, nose, mouth, ears...

Taking a fresh rag, Hiccup dipped it into the pitcher and dragged it gently along Jack's cheek, up into his hair line. A streak of white and silver was revealed, clean and bright against the otherwise filthy skin. The boy then ruffled the charcoal coloured hair lightly, raising a cloud of dust from it as a result. Beneath, shimmering, snowy strands gleamed dully under the now light layer of dust that coated it. Relief flooded the boy's increasingly warm core, practically roasting the cockles of his heart. His hunch had paid off, spectacularly. Overwhelmed and very tired, Hiccup dropped to his bony knees and rested his head on the wooden bed frame, laughing quietly under his breath.

"...Can't believe I did it... Didn't even have a... Ha." He cupped his face in his hands and pushed his hair back, gratitude glazing his smile when he met Astrid's eye.

"Thank you. You've no idea just what..." The girl waved away the mushy statement.

"It was nothing. I pinned a guy down, nothing out of the ordinary for me... But we_ did _have a deal." She reached over Jack's resting form and gingerly took a lock of strawberry blonde hair from behind her friend's pink ear.

"What's the story behind `_this_`?"

* * *

><p>AAAAHAHAHA LONG UPDATE. Now I know what's going to happen in the next chapter (and that my life has calmed down a bit), it should be a little smoother from here. Hopefully it's up to scratch but if not don't hesitate to send me a thrashing! Not much Jack POV here, but it will be explored more in the next instalment.

****As always: Reads, reviews, questions and critiques are appreciated, so keep them coming!****

O.G. XX

22. Chapter 22: Naked Truth

Notes: I CAN'T STOP MAKING PEOPLE CRY, I'M SORRY. Plus, the title is silly. I couldn't help myself.

* * *

><p>Eventually, a cool dampness phased through the darkness of Jack's world, dragging slowly down his cheek, under his chin and over his Adam's apple, leaving as suddenly as it had arrived . Mind still foggy, sounds started to filter through, muffled at first, but

growing sharper by the moment. A high voice and a slightly lower one conversing quietly.<p>

"... but even after he did what he asked, he dropped me through the ice... And I drowned." the lower voice apparently concluded, the sound of dripping water falling into a porcelain container. The cold dampness returned to the young man's skin, sweeping his clavicle deftly. His muscles still felt like they'd been boiled, but at least his natural coldness was returning to sooth that pain away. The water helped too, somehow refreshing him in way he hadn't been in a while, the occasional tinkling of droplets pleasantly reverberating in his brain.

To the sprite's right, the higher voice (definitely female, he recognised) was appalled at the other's statement and sputtered. "You can't be serious, that's crazy! What... How? How can you be here then?"

Water drops. That faint tinkling, a pause from the other.

"I- I'm not sure how yet, all I know is that I am here and that I'm alive... Not a ghost, like him."

Hiccup. He was... Telling Astrid what had happened. Yes, they had a deal, after she showed them that Toothless was fine, and then the Sun came through the roof and- It blinded him. Burned him.

The Frost Spirit parted his chapped lips, his throat feeling as dry as the Arctic tundras he so often visited.

"Hic...Cup?" He croaked, attempting to prise his eyelids apart, instantly regretting the decision because of the vertigo it wrought upon his already scrambled mind. The cool cloth left his chest, a scraping of wood against wood signalled that Hiccup stood and warm fingers laced themselves in his.

"Thank Freya, you're back with us..."

Jack took a breath to try and stop the pounding in his temples, craning his neck to face his freckled friend with limited success. Discomfort made him wince, although not severely enough to shut out the glimmer of relief he saw scampering across the boy's cautious little lip lift, an expression he found himself mirroring. Jack managed to choke out a short, coarse chuckle.

"Wasn't going anywhere. Tougher than I look, Kid." Those lifted lips dropped like a ton of bricks.

"Who are you calling kid?" He retorted hotly, narrowing his eyes so intensely that it was a wonder Hiccup could see. "If anything, you look younger than me!"

A cackle from across the bed caught the attention of both boys, shutting them up instantly. Astrid was grinning blithely, her flaxen fringe swinging as she shook her head.

"Calm down ladies, you're both pretty," She glanced down at Jack, quirking a disparaging brow. "However, I have to say sleeping beauty here gave us quite a scare. How are you doing there, Princess?"

She punched Jack good naturedly on the arm, perhaps a touch harder than she realised, but the young man kept quiet about it, instead slinging an only mildly bitter retort.

"Hey, it's not like I died again..." The warrior maiden's brightness flickered a fraction, but quickly returned when Jack flashed his brilliant teeth her way. "Thanks for your help, Astrid. I mean it."

"No need to get all sappy about it, you're a friend of Hiccup's. Vikings look after friends, no matter how annoying they might be or how _ridiculous _their hair is." She pushed her stool back and stood, picked up the axe that rested against the bed post and slung it over her strong shoulder.

"Besides, the last time I pinned you, it wasn't when you were at your best. I want a rematch when you're less pathetic." The girl winked smugly at the fuming young man and rounded the bed, heading for the door but paused on the way, shooting a brief glance at Hiccup before continuing towards the stair case. She called over her shoulder as she descended, to avoid delivering possibly ominous news to her friend's face.

"By the way, it's getting close to midday. Your father _might_ be back soon... If I see him I'll try and stall for time," the door latch clattered as the front door creaked open. "But no promises!"

The following slam indicated that Astrid had fled (before Hiccup could respond), leaving the boys in a silence that was only dampened by the ambient purrs of a sleeping Toothless. Noticing that his fingers were still laced in Jack's, Hiccup briskly untangled them and cleared his throat, distracting himself with a fascinating smudge across the floorboards. Jack reclined, the ghost of a smile threatening to pull at the corners of his dry mouth.

Seems like we're even, now. I saved you, you saved me... Even though I failed to do it a second time around.

In his peripheral vision a bundle of soiled blankets were hastily rolled up against the wall, evidence of the ordeal that Jack's immortal bones were still aching with. Cautiously, chilly fingertips explored his afflicted shoulder, gingerly tracing the rapidly closing hole with a twinge of relief. Hiccup had somehow found the source of infection and removed it all... He could feel it. Although his torso felt sore, it no longer felt constricted, and if the strands of silver in his sight were anything to go by, the physical symptoms of Mara's spell had dissipated as well.

"So, uh, How are you feeling?" Hiccup asked as he knelt to pick up a pitcher, setting it down on the bedside table neatly, next to... Something Jack had never seen before.

What on Earth was _that_?

"I'm fine," muttered Jack, curiously reaching and taking hold of the metallic contraption with his inquisitive fingers. "But what's this thing, some kind of brooch?" He turned it in his hands, examining the intricate little carvings and mysterious knobs attached to the side.

The boy sucked in his cheeks indignantly and took his invention from the Sprite's hands, but before those blue eyes could droop, Hiccup pushed the silver bangs back off Jack's forehead and hooked it over his ski slope nose.

"Works better if you actually wear it properly. Close your other eye." Hiccup suggested, adjusting the knob on the barrel. Doing as he was bid, the young man actually jumped when the magnification kicked in, gaping in wonder. He was transfixed and the boy wondered why, until he realised that his friend was staring through the barrel at _him_.

"Woah..." The sprite breathed, absolutely fascinated with the new world that had been revealed through the lens.

A faint pink tinted Hiccup's neck under the scrutiny of his own device, rooted to the spot. "Wh-What?"

"You have, like, a galaxy of freckles: I never thought it was possible for one person to have so many. I thought you had a lot, but _this_ is _intense-_"

The eye piece was snatched away and shoved in a draw. An indignant 'Hey!' followed by an exaggerated harumph was all the boy heard before a wave of nausea almost threatened to floor him. He managed to stay steady, but a loud, ravenous stomach growl signalled that it really _was_ time to eat, for the first time in over a day.

With all that had happened, the Viking had forgotten about food, but was fiercely reminded of the fact that he urgently needed some now. A low snicker from Jack brought Hiccup back to the present.

"You sure you don't keep a dragon in that _belly_ of yours? I've flown in _thunder_ storms _that_ made less racket than that!" The Sprite quipped, swinging his feet over the side of the bed frame.

"Hey, it's your fault for distracting me for two days straight! Listen, I'm going to get something from the larder You can finish washing up," the boy gestured to the cloth and pitcher. "there's a basin on the dresser and you can use my bronze shield to check yourself over. I'll be back in a shortly..."

After the other boy stumbled down the stair case: _thump, clunk, thump, clunk._

One preparatory beat later, Jack braced his arms and stood, silently thankful that his legs didn't buckle underneath him. A few loud pops escaped his spine as he raised his arms and stretched, his bones creaky and stiff. Rotating from the waist, Jack caught sight of himself in the shield and halted at the grubby, bedraggled youth that stared back at him. Although Hiccup had removed most of the filth from his face and torso, his hair was still chalky and matted, not to mention the state of his remaining garments.

The Sprite stooped before the bronze surface and pulled the basin and pitcher near, pouring a little of its contents into the wide bowl. He bent and absent mindedly peeled off his slimy breeches. He couldn't actually remember the last time he'd actually removed them, or bathed

for that matter.

He sat in front of the shield, saturating a clean rag with water, sweeping it up over his shin, knee and thigh, creating a white swathe through the dirt. The rag was almost black when Jack dipped it back into the basin. He could have really done with a waterfall or pond to shift this muck, but the spirit of convenience hadn't seen fit to grace them recently, so the Frost Spirit made do with the impromptu strip wash, feeling lighter and more refreshed as he progressed. Body temperature returning to normal, the drops ground to an eventual halt as they trickled over his flesh, solidifying into ice. They were dislodged with each movement as Jack twisted about to reach other parts of his body, scrubbing distractedly.

Hiccup was certainly not like him, he concluded, cupping his hands to splash his face. He'd been granted full resurrection, something that the Frost Spirit suspected ManÃ- wasn't capable of. The Moon had been out when the Viking was raised, but it had been almost searingly bright, as if... _As if_... Something was amplifying it beyond its usual means. But _what_?

Skin unsullied to a satisfying degree, Jack finished by upending the remainder of the pitcher over his bowed head, his hair rinsed from a sooty grey back to gleaming platinum. His arms locked temporarily as he allowed the final drops to plink into the basin, his shifting reflection recognisable once more, punctuated with occasional expanding ripples. Listlessly he the set the container down and lowered his arms, kneeling upon the damp floorboards, all action suspended as he tried to order his thoughts.

Regardless of what force had dredged his new friend up from his watery demise, the fact remained that Jack couldn't save him in the first place. Had Hiccup thought about this too? Did he resent the Frost Spirit for it, holding him responsible? After all, it was his lack of control that sealed the boy into his icy prison. If the Viking did hold any kind of grudge, the Sprite wasn't going to blame him for it. He just hoped with all of his paradoxically warm heart that he could be forgiven.

All Hiccup could think about at that moment was how devastatingly hungry he was. He had often gone without meals due to external circumstances, but never so long on so little. He rooted through the oak cupboard for something anything, almost crying with joy when he found a fresh wheel of cheese. Salivating, he cut himself a generous slice and practically inhaled the first couple of bites, instantly feeling more energetic when a sense of satiety started to kick in. He washed the dairy goodness down with a slug of mead, hardly registering the usual burn of alcohol when the brew slid down his throat. This made the boy pause, but he disregarded it moments later, simply putting his tolerance down to his increasing age and (possibly) size.

A good deal of chewing and sipping later, Hiccup decided it would be a good idea to go and check on Jack, perhaps take him something to snack on if he needed to.

Carefully he cut another slice of cheese and filled his own small cup with diluted mead for Jack. The boy swallowed his final mouthful and jogged upstairs with the drink, pushing open the door to his room.

"I'm still not sure if you eat or not, so I brought y-" The cup almost clattered to the floor when Hiccup sloshed most of the contents, flailing in shock. There, as still as the ice he created, was Jack, as naked as the day he was born. He knelt, head bowed over the murky basin, dripping hair frozen into real icicles.

Vertebrae were pushing gently towards the surface of Jack's curved back, wiry muscles tense beneath the bare skin. The naked young man didn't respond much to the noise, instead sighing softly and shifting his eyes to the make shift mirror, the bronze surface toning the boys reflected in it a delicate golden hue.

He made no move to cover up. The boy hastily plonked the cup in his grip down on to a shelf, wrestling the urge not to back out of the room.

Unbothered by his own nudity (and unaware of Hiccup's mortification), Jack straightened up a touch so he could be heard more easily. He pushed his hands through his freeze dried hair, breaking apart the icicles with a series of small crunches and restoring the natural texture in a matter of seconds. He wrapped his fingers in the silvery strands while he spoke.

"I need to know something Hiccup, and you have to be completely honest with me." The youth's bruised palms slid down his face and the heels dug into themselves into his eye sockets, pressing until the world was completely black. It was obvious to the younger boy that the Frost Spirit was still exhausted, rapidly fading bruises peppering his pale back and legs from Pitch's onslaught earlier.

Trying desperately to not shuffle awkwardly on the spot, the quietly flustered boy forced himself to speak.

"Ask away..." He quavered mildly, struggling to remain outwardly unperturbed when he was inwardly screaming.

He had never been good with nudity, even as a child. Due to his tiny frame, he'd always felt it necessary to cover up and as a result he disliked nakedness, on himself and on others. The fact that he knew the owner of the offending body some how made it simultaneously better and worse.

The kneeling young man laboured to his feet with a sigh, hands on hips, staring at his toes.

"Do you... Do you..." He started, but whipped around frustratedly, knowing it would be easier in the long run to just face his friend like a man and spit out what he wanted to say.

"Do you blame me for your death?" Jack exclaimed, spreading his arms to visually demonstrate the scale of this matter.

"Oh-Wow-Um."

Hiccup's palm flew instinctively to his eyes when Jack turned around, devoting every gram of will power to keeping his eyes upwards of the young man's bust. He slid his hand off his brow and folded his arms

tightly, tucking his hands underneath his pits. Resolutely, the boy gave one decisive shake of the head, never once breaking eye contact with his friend.

"Of course I don't, Pitch was the one who broke the ice," The boy calmly pointed out, trying so reassure Jack with the facts of the matter. "The only one to blame for my minor lapse in life is him."

Doubting eyes creased at Hiccup, as if they couldn't comprehend the truth in the answer that had been offered. The boy's own eyes were briefly distracted by the motion of Jack replacing his hands on his hips, managing to stop at the navel before flicking back up to the oblivious young man's neck line. The Adam's apple bobbed while he spoke, providing an adequate focus for the little Viking's treacherous gaze.

"I couldn't save you from it in the first place, though, " the young man fretted, bowing his head penitently. "Aren't you mad, that I was dumb enough to listen to Pitch? That I couldn't control my own powers? That I watched you drown?"

"If I was, would I have helped you two hours ago? You saved my life before!" Hiccup retorted, an unexpected energy surged his skinny arms into action, held out like beseeching little claws. "Even if I could hold a grudge against you, I wouldn't!" He adamantly clamped his de-clawed hands on to Jack's bare shoulders, barely registering the lack of clothing any more. All he needed to focus on was within decent viewing parameters.

Fiery brows knitted together and jade eyes widened as Hiccup geared up for a passionate speech.

"All that matters to me is that you tried. I thought you were a jerk when we first met, I'll admit that, but I was just as bad for not showing you an ounce of humility: The fact that you would risk everything to help someone you barely knew again and again with no demands in return or even a kind word..." The boy retrieved his left hand and splayed it over his own chest, as if he could convey the emotions of his heart externally.

"...Is worth much more to me than you not being able to pull me out of a chilly pond. You saved me and Toothless from the snow storm, helped to defend my people against the Berserkers, even sacrificing your freedom to Pitch for mine? You're not just my friend, Jack... You're my guardian." He searched the pale, doubtful face carefully. He needed a conclusion.

"I forgive you."

There was an unnatural stillness between the pair, Hiccup holding his breathe as he awaited a response. Jack was practically catatonic for a few seconds, before his gaunt countenance thawed into one of warm gratitude. He knew that whatever contradictory point he'd make to would be abruptly shot down by his clever friend. Glancing upwards to battle the sting in his eyes, Jack tightly pressed his lips together, unsure about how to shape them. Upwards won.

"Thank you." Was all Jack could say before his joy spilled from the eyes, feeling stupid for losing it but ecstatic that someone didn't

think he messed up wherever he went. "Thank you, for_ believing_ in me."

Hiccup, stunned, search briefly on his person for a handkerchief but found none. Instead, he slipped his hand inside his sleeve and blotted his embarrassed friend's damp, purple cheeks: What had he _done_?

"Ooooo...Kay, um. Well, er, you're _welcome_" He attempted, chipping the occasional frozen tear off his friend's face with a nail. He was calming now, but seemed ashamed at his outburst in the first place, sniffing loudly.

"Sorry about that... Not used to being told I got stuff right." Jack mumbled, raising his shining eyes.

"Welcome to the club. I'm an inventor, remember?" Hiccup groaned sarcastically, spinning on his heel to find the remnants of his friend's garments. They were either shredded or dirty, but he doubted Jack would have a problem repairing them using his crook.

"But please, if you could do me just _one_ favour... Put some pants on?"

* * *

><p>Yes. Naked, oblivious Jack. And Mortified Hiccup. This is still a gen fic, however, so it will only end in embarrassment and not the __**other**__** thing.**_

**As always, thanks for reading! Reviews, feedback, etc. are vastly appreciated!**

**Updates coming. **

**Q.G. Xx**

23. Chapter 23: On Even Ground

**Note: Special thanks to Endy and Space for their help with this chapter. I really would have been stuck without you guys. **

* * *

><p>If there was ever one thing that people underestimated in Astrid Hofferson, it was her intelligence. The villagers could accept that she was strong, beautiful and brave, but few considered the possibility of a brilliant strategical mind underneath that fine head of flaxen hair. It was well known that she could think on her feet, but planning was a hidden talent that the warrior maiden kept to herself so she could always stay one step ahead in hostile situations.<p>

Distracting the chief had been a delicate situation, but with the cooperation of the other riders, they'd managed weave a tight web of... _Augmented _interpretations of events. When Hookfang had returned to the verge with Toothless in his claws, Stoick had almost burst a blood vessel. Thankfully, Astrid had flown in before the pair landed, Snotlout as her pillion. After Jack and Hiccup had

disappeared in the swirl of darkness over the hostile sea, Strangely, the Berserkers had completely halted their assault when the dark sand had dissipated, letting down their sails and physically rowing back towards the horizon. All the wailing, fire balls and horn blasts had dissolved into silence like a sugar cube in boiling water. This was unnerving to Astrid on a fundamental level as the Warrior's brave heart thudded uneasily within her chest, stark against the hush.

Astrid had known something had gone terribly awry, but had decided to look for them herself with the rest of the team when the sun rose... If it ever would. For that to be a remote possibility, the girl would have to convince Stoick that his son and his new legendary companion had taken a flight around Berk to check for possible blind spots in defences. When the chief had asked her why they had left Toothless behind, she explained that one of the connecting rods had been damaged after a near miss from the Berserker barrage. A projectile had skimmed the dragon, leaving him somewhat distressed but otherwise all right. As was Hiccup, whom Jack had taken under wing to fly the coast of Berk? They could be gone for a few hours...

"And didn't Hiccup want to try out the new trebuchets in battle?" Astrid helpfully suggested, nudging Stoick strategically away from the front line and the possibility of running into Fishlegs, Ruff and Tuff. The Berserkers had been silent since the Sun rose, but they couldn't trust that to be a sign of retreat, It wasn't their style.

Bemused but in agreement, Stoick lumbered away to get them erected with Gobber, taking off on the monstrous blue Thornado.

If she were anyone else, also known as 'weaker', she would have cried in relief that everything had gone so well.

It wouldn't be long afterwards that the boys would return and caused a whole myriad of new problems for the girl, since Hiccup had apparently managed to get himself killed during the interim. It wasn't all bad though: he'd apparently recovered from the ordeal.

****Xxx****

"I cannot believe you don't even have a spark left to just put some patches on them or something," chided Hiccup, who was rummaging through his clothing chest, more than a little miffed. Back to him while the Viking bustled about, Jack clicked his tongue irritatingly and leaned back on the wooden slatted bed that creaked when his palms pressed down on the boards.

The 'borrowed' sheet he was wearing (Hiccup had thrown it at him when he accidentally looked down, much to Jack's bewilderment), had been fashioned quickly into a rough looking knee length toga by the creative hands of the Frost Spirit, apparently from a foreign land that his young friend had never visited. It elegantly draped over one shoulder, cascading down his back, between his shoulder blades, slung under the ribs and over one side of his chest. He swung his legs beneath the fine weave, feet scraping the floor boards with each pass.

"Hey, I'm weak, all right? I can't waste energy manipulating

materials on a base lev-" He paused, noting the puzzled purse of Hiccup's lip when the boy turned around with an armful of garments. He cleared his throat. "I mean, I don't have the juice right now. I used to borrow all my clothes anyway before I figured that trick out."

Hiccup clinked over and, after dropping the clothes in Jack's lap unceremoniously, pivoted on his foot, busying himself studying the wall. He registered a faint rustle of fabric crumpling to the ground behind him and the creak of wood.

"Uh, not criticising here, but you're a fair bit more _wee_ than I am. I think I'd suffocate getting in a pair of your pants." Commented the Sprite casually, unfolding the breeches sceptically. It was time for Hiccup to click his tongue.

"They're not _my_ size, genius. My dad expected a growth spurt last summer-"

"_Why_ does that not surprise me?"

A gibe, quickly ignored.

"Well, it never happened. They should do... So stop being so choosy and cover up!" He huffed, folding his arms and tapping his foot impatiently.

Jack rolled his eyes as he pulled the pale grey (slightly short) breeches on, finding them comfortably snug but thankfully not tight around his hips. He drummed his fingers over his belly, strolling out in front of Hiccup who visibly exhaled in relief. Jack wrinkled his nose incredulously, shaking his head as he loosened the lace at the tunic's neck.

"I really don't see what the big deal is. You're a boy, everything's the same... Right?" He added quizzically, casting Hiccup a half joking glance. The boy snatched the tunic from his annoying companion's fingers and wrenched it over his spiky head, practically popping when it exited the neck hole. He shoved the crook into his friend's hand and reached for the white fur draped across his bed post, offering it to the freshly clothed Sprite.

"Don't need it. Plus, I gave it to you." He flatly refused, pressing it back into the boy's hands. "Was never really my style. Had to wear it for an obligatory function in Valhalla. Can you believe those guys have a dress code?"

Stunned into silence by Jack's blasphemous references to the Gods, Hiccup blinked and took to cloak back, pinning it listlessly to his own shoulder: How could this guy speak so casually of the fantastic, but marvel at the mundane? Of course, the boy hadn't time to dwell on this and glanced at his reflection in the bronze shield, instantly reminded of his own current aesthetic predicament.

It paid to tell the truth as soon as feasibly possible, Hiccup had found in recent times, despite his natural knack for deception and had decided while studying his wall that honesty would be the best policy when briefing his Dad about his current predicament and the situation with Mara at large. He wasn't precisely sure how yet, but the Berserkers had something to do with this, and the fact he was

resurrected didn't feel like an accident to him.

He ran his fingers through his conspicuous hair and chewed a lip in thought.

"I'm telling my Dad what happened," He stated to Jack, pulling back his hair and began deftly weaving the strands from his widow's peak, tightly pulling the sections into a neat French braid. "The sooner he finishes yelling, the sooner he can calm down and help us form a plan to get rid of the Berserkers... And deal with Mara." A sharp, final tug against his scalp.

The Viking pulled some thread from a spool on his desk and tied up the remaining hair into a tiny pony, securing the braid that pulled his hair up off of his hair and face, perfectly concealed when under his helmet.

"You look... A decade older like that." Jack commented, tilting his head at the meticulous style, jutting his lip while Hiccup picked up his helmet and placed it carefully atop his crown.

"I can't afford drawing too much attention when we're looking for my Father. We just need to track him down and get this over with." There was a small clatter and rustling from behind him, catching his friend's brassy reflection searching a bedside drawer.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Hiccup piped indignantly, but Jack continued until he found what he was searching for, grinning at his incredible luck when he withdrew what he'd hoped to find.

"See, this is another thing I like about you, Hic: you're a _hoarder_."

Two long leather laces trailed from the draw, untangling with a deft pull of his fingers. He crouched, wrapping the laces around the cuffs of his trousers, winding and overlapping them intricately with practiced ease and tied them off. He stood, catching the Viking's bemused expression.

"Is... That even necessary?" He asked, not sure if he wanted to know. The Frost spirit hooded his eyes, disparaging.

"Isn't it obvious? It's so I don't get drafty while I fly. I thought you were meant to be _smart_."

The dull throb of a head ache thudded warmly behind Hiccup's eye sockets and he pinched the bridge of his nose to try and stimulate some relief.

"I wish I understood you, sometimes. But then... I'm almost glad I don't?"

** Xxx**

After a quick surveillance of the immediate village from Stoick's porch, they stepped out and quietly latched the door, the calmer square thrumming with less excitement than earlier, villagers digging into breakfast comprised of left overs from the feast. A few spits sizzled lazily, the meat sweating as they dripped over their dying fires. The few villagers that meandered about took no notice of the

movement by the chief's cabin: A small blessing.

Stepping out of the shade, Hiccup felt a surge of ravenous hunger when the bright sunlight hit him, limbs feeling electrified as he soaked up the rays, recalling the leap for the skylight he'd made earlier in his room. So strong was this buzz that he almost skipped ahead, stealthily tearing a leg the size of his fore arm inconspicuously from a particularly large turkey, ripping a strip of flesh from the limb hungrily. He caught himself before the second bite, briefly looking around to see Jack idly shifting on the porch, nervously extending his wrist, as if the sun light were a torrent of scalding water. When his skin didn't sizzle, he timidly traipsed down the steps and joined Hiccup, relief painting his features. "Well, that's one thing we don't have to worried about. Where to now?"

The slight boy tore off another strip of meat, chewing thoughtfully.

"Astrid mentioned my Dad setting up the trebuchets around the island. They're anchored to key strategical areas, and if my dad set off a few hours ago, chances are he'll not be far away. Can you fly?"

The Frost Spirit experimentally summoned a heady of wind, not feeling a strain. He nodded, looping his left arm around Hiccup's waist securely. He glanced down at the boy, recoiling a fraction when he found that he had consumed almost the entire leg.

Almost stuffing the entire length femur into his mouth, Hiccup blissfully sucked the last tendrils of flesh from the bone with a smack of his lips. He finally acknowledged the stock still body beside him. The hungry Viking swallowed heavily, suddenly self conscious. "Uh...Something up?"

Mildly mortified, Jack blinked and barked a short laugh "No, I'm just impressed... But I'm not exactly sure why." he replied honestly, shaking his head in disbelief and tightly grasped the boy's waist once more. They took to the air as soon as the bony arms encircled his neck, finding that he was recovering at a pleasing pace.

The turkey bone discarded, the dragon rider sighed, tried to ignore the gnawing hunger that still rattled around in his minute stomach. What was wrong with him? And why was he so warm? Sure, the sun was exceptionally gracious today, but his breath still clouded heavily in the frigid Berk air. Perhaps the cloak was a bad choice... Had Jack noticed the heat, as he held him so closely to his cold body? Maybe Hiccup was just being paranoid, but still.

Sweat beaded finely on his upper lip, but he ignored it, instead keeping a keen eye out for his father's hulking frame along the coast. Trebuchets peppered the jagged cliffs, great wooden monoliths, looming and ready to ward off the untold threats that awaited them. Thankfully it didn't take long, Stoick's impressive frame striking a distinct shape with his billowing furs, flaming beard and signature horns. The slight boy's mouth went dry at the sight, feeling woefully unprepared for the grievous encounter he was about to endure. A reassuring squeeze on his waist drew his nervous attention to the one carrying him, pale mossy eyes meeting icy blue for a moment, understanding passing between them, knowing intrinsically they were in for an ordeal... But they were in it together.

Wind buffeted their landing, making it near silent, but Stoick's keen senses picked it up anyway, rounding quickly and greeting his son with open, ham like arms. He called a few directions over his shoulder to the group that were setting up the complex contraption behind them, pulley systems taut and calibrated, piles of ammunition stacked neatly by the launcher.

The chief returned his attention to his heir and the Sprite that flanked him. The boy was wearing his helmet, but had tied up his hair, not a strand on show, greatly at odds with the usual, swinging auburn bob he sported. The gigantic man lumbered across the plateau, noticing that his son was looking a bit pale, freckles dark against the ashy complexion, probably incurred by a lack of sleep.

"Ah, Hiccup! Astrid told me about what happened out in the field. I trust there's no holes in our defences around the island? We're almost done here so..." He slowed, noticing the familiar wringing that those small hands often resorted to when he was about to hear something he wouldn't like. The chief ground to a halt, noticing the lack of eye contact he was being offered. He cast a wary glance over to the tall, pale youth at his son's side, noting his attire.

Why did he need to change his clothes, and more importantly, why were they _Hiccup's_? What had happened? This was not going to be an explanation he'd like at all.

"What's wrong, son? You look... Peaky." He took a step closer, only for the boy to bow his head a few degrees more, knuckles positively white with tension. The pale youth beside him switched feet and swung his staff over a shoulder, fixing Stoick with a sharp blue stare. He barely looked as if he were breathing, hypothermic bottom lip held tersely between his unnaturally white teeth.

Suspicion simmering in his chest, Stoick's face darkened, muscles bunching beneath his sea battered skin.

"You see, we didn't get around the island, because we were... Waylaid," The boy took a breath, determined to make this as concise and painless as possible. "Jack and I were taken, when we took out the Berserker beacons and catapults." The boy grabbed his Father's chunky fore arm, finally raising his eyes. The gigantic man gasped in terror when he saw the luminous Jade irises, picking his son up and off the ground, lifting him far away from Jack. The helmet flew off with a metallic clatter, unveiling the bright braid beneath.

Scrutinizing his boy closely, Stoick pulled the cotton out of the strawberry blonde hair, and unraveled the intricate style in an instant.

Stoick blanked, holding the nervous child at arm's length. His skin was grayed with exhaustion and dry to the touch, making the copious amount of freckles absolutely stark against the unnatural paleness. Sunlight illuminated the pale hair into a blazing mass, whipping and flickering like a flame in the high coastal winds. This had gone downhill much faster than the pair had anticipated.

"What have you done to my Son?!" He bellowed, rounding on Jack murderously, who stumbled backwards at the attention. The Spirit

blinked, but righted himself, drawing up to his full height and puffing out his chest, narrowing his eyes darkly. His mouth was a thin line of determination, but his voice notably wavered when he retorted.

"I didn't do _anything,_ " he shot through gritted teeth, fighting to retain eye contact. "It was Mara: He took us both to a frozen lake, wanted me to join him. By using your son against me!"

Still in his Father's lofty hold, Hiccup nodded feverishly, and chimed in.

"Dad, he's right, the Nightmare king, he kidnapped us. And..." A swallow, another breath. "He calls himself Pitch, he knew Jack, they fought a long time ago, and Jack won. But he had leverage this time." His Father stopped his aggressive panting, turned to the boy, a furious kind of curiosity brewing behind his gaze.

"What happened _exactly?_" He growled lowly, leaving no room for lies. Hiccup knew that if he skipped over a single point, the man would sense it immediately, so the boy sighed and glanced down at his dangling feet.

"We were stood on a frozen lake, and Mara... _Pitch_ hurt Jack. Badly. Shot him with a poison arrow. He tried to turn me against him using his words, I think so I could convince Jack to join him, maybe? But, it didn't work. I'm not that thick." The little Viking grinned a little, quietly proud of himself, but it was short lived. He got ready to continue, heart heavy once more.

"Wait," Interrupted Stoick gruffly as he finally caught up with the tale completely "Mara? As in the God of Nightmares? He's _here?_" He was answered with an exasperated nod, as Hiccup wanted to get the story over with as quickly as possible and didn't appreciate the disruption. While his Father absorbed the information, he resumed his tale.

"Yes! So Pitch moved on to plan B, making the ice crack beneath me, telling Jack that if he didn't submit and join him, he'd drop me into the water." Stoick's face was slowly falling, a mask of Horror moulding his features like clay under merciless thumbs. "So Jack did, he let himself succumb to the arrow's poison... Pitch's infection, and transformed, and Pitch let me go. Straight down." Hiccup sighed and shut his eyes, not wanting to see his Dad's face when he dropped the bombshell of honesty upon him.

"I drowned, Dad. Beneath the ice."

"What." Flat. Shocked. The hands that held him trembled.

Ah. Big mistake. Well, in for a penny... The miraculous Viking raised his head.

"As in, I fell through the ice." He replied evenly, keeping his eyes as still as humanly possible.

"And...And went under water." The great man stated. Still flat. Still shocked. The lack of emotion made Hiccup uneasy in a way he couldn't describe.

"Yeah."

"You didn't come back up for air?"

"Nope."

"But...You didn't- You couldn't have. That would mean you-You Died?!" Ah, there it was. The familiar voice raise and strange relief washed over the boy, only to be tinged almost instantly with fear. He replied meekly, fighting to keep eye contact.

"I _did. _By_ drowning_."

"You can't have, you're right here: I know what drowning is and you didn't do it! Or else you'd still-"

"Something... Raised me. Back to the World, to you guys."

The even keel of Stoick's arms dropped for a moment, physically weakened from the news he'd received. He met his son's gaze evenly, trying so hard to understand concept he'd been expected to digest.

"But you were_ dead_..."

"Uh, I got better?"

The large man's face almost crumpled under the weight of misery, but instead flared with the heat of anger, whipping around and screaming at a particularly dejected looking young man.

"What in Freya's name is wrong with you?!" He thundered, rage making his beard bristle. "Why didn't you save my son? Look at him, he's been tainted by some sorcery, defiled! It's all your fault!" Stoick pulled his child closer to his chest, protectively, possessively.

Moisture limned the Spirit's eyes, and he grasped the crook desperately to stay upright while his posture buckled under the weight of the chief's accusations.

"I-I couldn't, my body was going hay wire, there was nothing-"

"I don't want to hear your excuses, Frost demon!"

The gargantuan hands were growing tight around Hiccup's comparatively fragile body now, and the boy shook his head, trying to intervene and jump to his friend's defence. "It wasn't his fault, he tried to save me, but his powers were out of control!"

The Vikings that were calibrating the trebuchet had ceased their work now, gathering quietly around the commotion, muttering and nudging each other in fascination at the events that were transpiring.

"Hiccup, you should know your place. Until I say, you are confined to our home," Stoick growled, holding his son at arm's length once more, shaking that thin frame once to emphasise his point. He glowered venomously at the silvery Sprite, eyes filled with disgust. "And you are never to see this... This _creature_ again."

Skinny legs swung uselessly as Hiccup writhed like a disoriented eel in those sausage-like fingers. "No, you can't do that Dad, he's- He's my friend! And I'm the only one _he _has, too!"

The unguarded show of compassion made Jack freeze, and stare at his (only) companion for a moment. A tug at his admittedly dusty heart strings unfolded the Sprite from his submissive stance to one more befitting of who he was.

And _what_ he was.

"Leave, Frosti! Before you make a mess of anything el-" The chief began to command, only for a battered crook to be raised high above an unnaturally still head and slammed in the ground, causing vicious looking frost to radiate from its impact origin. Harsh winds making every eye in the vicinity stream, with the exception of Jack himself and oddly, Hiccup. Dry, blue tinged fingers coiled around the beaten wood and in that moment the pale youth's face reflected every single one of its three hundred years, icy gaze imbued with a very real threat of danger. The athletic, wiry muscles of the young man tensed, not unlike the familiar way Toothless would when stalking some form of prey, and the temperature dropped to an ungodly level.

Icicles developed, shooting up and sprouting, cracking faintly across the stone plateau maliciously, Hiccup raising his feet as a line passed beneath them. Stoick swallowed behind his beard.

"And since when did you have a say in anything I do, Stoick?" Jack frost proclaimed sharply, tone as cold as his name sake. His chest puffed out once more, lithe frame taut, battle ready. Hiccup shivered, and not because of the rapidly chilled air. One could have cut the tension with a knife.

"In fact," the youth continued, jabbing a nail bitten finger into the chief's might chest once. "While we're on the subject, since when did Hiccup lose his freedom of speech? I'm pretty sure you haven't the authority to take it away."

Spreading his arms wide, Jack surveyed the small cluster of Vikings around him and addressed them, in full oration mode, one he had not engaged in a long while.

"What right do any of you possess to undermine him, really? A boy who thanklessly tamed your enemies of three centuries, who harnesses their power with an innate gift, and nowadays you hardly bat an eyelid?" The Frost Spirit held his forehead between a forefinger and thumb incredulously, barking a short, humourless laugh.

"It's a joke! And then... And _then _you have the audacity to challenge an immortal being who could encase this isle completely in ice within a day, ordering him to leave when the only reason he came was to do his _duty_"

He gestured to the Vikings with a smooth dolly of his crook, poised, accusatory.

"You should all be ashamed, and I will _not _stand for any of it, at least while I'm around," he lowered his arm, jutting out his lip in thought, shattering the sage mask instantly. "Which, since it snows

nine of the months of the year here could be quite a long time." He mentally uncoiled, and his shoulders rounded as the youth and vitality poured back into his quietly beautiful face.

"I'll admit. I was just as angry as you were when I couldn't save Hiccup: Mara had... Released something inside me. Temporarily took away the control I had over the powers I wield, thickening the ice, freezing the water. As hard as I tried to get through..." He clenched and unclenched his spare fist and blinked rapidly, banishing the sting that threatened to make them water. Snow had begun to slowly drift down, despite the bright sunlight over the isolated plateau, and Hiccup swore that his heart physically cracked in sympathy. The Sprite met the chief's shining eyes gently this time, all sharpness that had been present previously was blunted by the reverie.

"Stoick, I'm sorry." The young man apologised, remorse cracking the low voice. "I didn't mean for this to happen... But there's a bigger threat now, and if you want to reprimand me later, fine. Just... All I ask is that you really listen to your son. Some higher power decided that Hiccup was important enough to this land to bring him back to it. And for now, that's all the reason we need to listen to him in this most probable time of war, since his perspective tends to be the most coherent."

Jack nodded to Hiccup, giving him the go ahead to finish his tale without any fear of further interruptions. The burly men and women turned to the boy expectantly, who was still uselessly dangling two feet off the ground. He flicked his head left and right, and back to his father, implying with a look that he was just about bored with the situation. Stoick put his son down in the manner one would set down a china cup, metal foot scraping the ground lightly.

He straightened his shirt and spread his thin shoulders, all eyes on him and the much more intimidating youth at his side: The silver haired young man stood tall and elegant, his angelic face belying the potentially terrible wrath behind his dark gaze. No one dared interrupt.

"All right," Announced Hiccup, sure that he had the rapt attention of his Father. "Mara is here, and I have an awful feeling that the Berserks are here because of Him. His power is unlike anything I've ever seen, he can shift, change into other things. Manipulate people with this strange black dust." Jack shook his head, stepping forward. He rested a thumb inside the waistband of his borrowed pants, deep in thought.

"It's dream sand, but corrupted. " He clarified, tapping his temple. "It can make you suggestible, but can also wrack you with insurmountable fear. Make you panicked, uncoordinated. Currently, it's the biggest problem we face, because even I know next to nothing about it-" He paused, grimacing at Hiccup, who bit his lip in return. "And none of us are immune to it."

"Sand, you say?" Queried the young smith, rubbing his scarred chin thoughtfully between a forefinger and thumb. His supernatural friend nodded briskly, leaning wearily into his crook. Why did he suddenly feel so weak? Maybe the whole Frost and Brimstone charade hadn't been his cleverest idea.

"Yes, he stole it from the Sand man... As far as I know, as soon as it gets in your eyes the effects begin. The only reason I beat them was because I removed it after rubbing my eyes." A quizzical light sparked in Hiccup's face, but the uneasy poise that Jack exhibited at the memory suggested that it was a subject that should be (delicately) broached later. The Sprite continued "But what Mara _is _weak against is the light, he always has been, keeping to the shadows and the cover of Night. If he makes a move, it'll definitely be after sun set."

* * *

><p>Thanks for being so patient guys! Sorry for the delay, but I've been so dry lately with inspiration._

(And yes, Jack has visited Scotland.)

**As always, thanks for reading. Reviews and critiques are always appreciated. Questions are also welcome, just PM them or drop a line on the Berk to Burgess tumblr. Xx**

**Q.G. Xx**

24. Chapter 24: Rain coats and Renovations

Notes: I am terribly sorry about the unexpected Hiatus, the worst seems to have passed now and updates can resume.~

* * *

><p>"It could be said of the Nightmare king that his contempt for humanity and his unforgiving nature stemmed from the fact that his skin was far too thin: It seemed the ghoul had concocted a rather inventive remedy for that."

-Loki's observational journal, Circa 1012 AD.

* * *

><p>Amber eclipses emerged from murky darkness, oddly unaffected by the briny atmosphere: Instead, they merely refracted the minimal light, unblinking and hard. The odd creak from within the bowels of the ship echoed and rang throughout the damp, salty interior, yet the warriors didn't stir... nor would they wake of their own volition ever again: While they slept, a little sliver of shadow had crept stealthily down each of their throats, commandeering their nervous systems and engulfing the vulnerable souls within, for sustenance and to make room for themselves.<p>

Aside from the lapping of waves and groaning planks there was a guttural snore in the chief's quarters. All that was needed to rouse him was a brisk chill sent up the gruff man's spine, jolting him effectively out of a deep slumber and he stared up into a gaunt, ashen face, ink black hair swept back from its smooth brow and large golden eyes. The chief quivered and thrashed for a moment against the intrusive presence until a flicker of recognition lit his features.

"L-Lord Mara?" Quavered the man, still muddled from sleep and swallowing thickly, trying to lubricate his fear tightened throat. The looming figure at his bed side did not move, only narrowing gilded slits in his direction. The chief paled, sweat beading on his top lip as he opened his mouth and shut it a few times only for his voice to pick the most inopportune time to desert him. Mara always incurred a feeling of dread, hopelessness and panic that blossomed in the heart of any mortal he drew near to, and being human the Berserker leader was no different. Usually, the warriors thrived on this surge, drawing strength from the adrenalin it generated, spurring them on to fight harder, oblivious to pain, especially under the moon's maddening influence. But right now the chief wasn't in battle, and the fear only served to stiffen his limbs in terror under the Shadowy God's stolid study, wondering just what on Earth he wanted with him outside of the war room.

At last, the tall being spoke.

"Your men, they performed as a most effective diversion." Pitch remarked, casually plucking a peach from a roughly hewn fruit bowl. He tossed it from palm to palm without and paid little heed, but consecutively caught it with ease nonetheless. The encircled party watched as the God rounded his bedpost in a weightless gait and continued smoothly, but his golden gaze never left the prone human, tangled in his sheets. Near expired candles sputtered when an illusory cloak swept past them, a draft causing the flames to choke on their wax and sizzle out of existence. Gulping audibly, the cowering man nodded and pressed his back against a plain headboard, to subtly edge away from the pacing figure, cape unfurled and held aloft without a breath of wind as he strode to the other side of the bed.

"Indeed, my Lord. My warriors each fight with the strength of ten under the moon's light. If we could have only breached the ice blockade before our withdrawal-"

A grey hand raised itself to stay the human's prattle as sharp teeth sank themselves into the peach's fuzzy skin and ripped away a large orange chunk of juicy flesh: Pitch chewed it ponderously for a moment to then swallow the bite with only minor repulsion.

From where he had broken the surface a rot had begun to spread, shrivelled the fruit's vivid form and paled it into an unappetising brown. Grey lips pulled themselves into a bitter line as he regarded the peach and crushed it into his palm, only for it to disperse into shimmering dust.

The purr that passed his thin lips was positively laced with a lethargically dispensed poison.

"You must consider it a pity that you couldn't lay waste to the Berkians. That your forces couldn't slake their blood lust must feel like a failure unto itself. But you all performed admirably all the same: My thanks to you..."

If the truth were told, Pitch truly had been pleased with the savage army's role so far, and promptly considered whether it had been necessary to instigate the next stage of his plans for them when the Frost Sprite had fallen so easily under the thrall of his wicked fletch. The added bonus of which had been the resulting death of

Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, sole heir to the village, sure to spread despair and pain throughout the tribe, in addition to feeding the monstrous being a rare delicacy indeed: Fresh grief and the shock of raw pain, from the eyes and lips of Jack Frost himself.

Even just hours after its occurrence, the flavour of pure sorrow degenerates into a weary, bleak taste, dusty on the palette one could say. Contrary to popular belief, the God of Nightmares actually ingested a variety of emotions, but he just happened to acclimatise a preference for the more negative side of the spectrum, craving the depth that joy or relief couldn't provide. Brighter feelings were found to be far too sickly and sweet, unsatisfying and they never left him sated, much the same way confectionery briefly betrayed an appetite in humans.

"But I'm afraid that I still require more from you and the rest of your men."

No, Pitch was certainly sustained by panic and woe. Possibly the most repulsive emotion he encountered by far was Hope, so bitter on his tongue, and it gave him tremendous heartburn whenever it rolled over his tongue. Yet, he had felt the tiniest flutter of that deceptive repulsive sensation when he had first encountered Hiccup himself, pining just a little for the boy to join him, to come around to his way of thinking.

It had been an extremely small but vain pipe dream, for Pitch had known the boy's (many) fears and subsequently played to them, as was his prerogative. But there was a fortified thread of persistence that spurred the Viking Prince to traverse the treacherous tight rope of adversity, using his keen mind and creativity to convert his doubts into a strength. An ally like that... Turned to the shadows, possibly into one of his generals when he came of age? It would have been something unlike the Earth had ever seen: Technology and magic in combination, to usher in an age of terror and chaos on a scale never before encountered in this or any cosmos...

This was not meant to be however, and even his plan to convert Jokul Frosti had fallen awry. The little Guardian had obviously resisted at first, and he could have even staved off the infection had it not been for the Nightmare King's use of 'leverage'. But he would come in time, when he realised that the other Guardians would shun him for his transformation, the villagers would recoil in terror and the lonely creature would once more learn that he was doomed to solitude. That was unless he joined his dark sire, and it would take just a few more strong applications of insistence to make the boy his.

All this had been in motion, running like clockwork to fall into place within Pitch's Dark machinations, until something alerted him to a vital piece of information that could send his plans into a tailspin. He would have been content only to take the soldiers and leave the leader be, but then a scout Fearling just had to return from its round of espionage.

It seemed a Hiccup had interrupted the flow of his carefully articulated machine of conquest... By apparently coming back from the dead.

...What?

Pitch blinked once and asked the dark little creature to repeat itself, to ensure he had heard it correctly. The answer came again, and hollow cheeks twitched, brow creased in a feeling that was rather impossible to adequately convey with words.

A turn of events the Nightmare King hadn't anticipated inconveniently unveiled itself, but he fully intended to investigate the matter with his own eyes. This (not so regrettably) meant that the shadowy deity would need to acquire a host body to travel in the sun's unforgiving grace: the need of the grizzled man's protective casing became a necessity.

"W-what do you need, M-my Lord Mara?"

The thick, noxious cloud of silence that loomed heavily over the bedridden man actually broke as nerves unwittingly yanked a soft, dry whimper from him that echoed in lieu of shaky words. But the God merely revelled in his slave's panic, drinking it in as a light morsel before his arduous journey into the perilous light.

Raw screams would echo throughout out the galley, only to fall upon deaf ears that now belonged what remained of his ghastly crew, each taken with a parasite that would leave nothing but a husk behind, much like their 'Father' was about to do.

This vessel wouldn't have been the God's first choice, not by any stretch, but the skin was all he required, and ironically its skin did stretch. The flesh moulded around its tall host, adopting the form of the tall looming figure it encased, stretching taut over sharp features and burning useless organs away inside the cavity that Mara had created with his presence.

There was a series of sickly cracks as the being rolled his neck, breaking in his protective coat. The sheath wouldn't last for long, perhaps a few hours at most before it wore away completely, but certainly enough time to investigate and validate his subordinate's claims.

Wet, fleshy lungs filled with a first cloying breath, normally unneeded to the Nightmare Lord, but it was the price he paid for donning the skin of men.

"..._Disgusting_."

XXX

It was odd to be the centre of attention for two days running, especially after such a stint of utter isolation. The ice phenom wasn't quite sure how to feel about it, as he stood in the ring of gruff, bearded observers. The boy at his side had been mulling over the information supplied to him for a short while now in silent contemplation, as if the bones of a plan had already begun to calcify in his mind. Jack glanced over to Stoick, who had folded burly arms across his barrel chest, and studied the morose creases in the stout man's countenance.

Apprehension was not a strong enough word for what the chief was feeling: It seemed that in the space of twenty four hours, his village's short age of peace and prosperity had come to a grinding halt, rudely interrupted by the ancient spirit's arrival and the

subsequent invasion of the Berserker tribe.

And also, as it turned out, the temporary demise of his only son. A stern jaw clenched in retaliation to the bitter wash over the owner's tongue, but a great, preparatory heave of his chest resolved to break the stint of calm. It didn't help that his second in Command had needed to run back to his forge for tools before he received this news, that there was no one to stand with him in this trying time._

Unwinding those gargantuan limbs, Stoick gave three thunderous claps and drew the rough aggregation in with the startling noise.

Taking not one breath, but two, the chief offered a wide gesture to his villagers, his son, and, regrettably, the tiny God.

"Alright, everyone: You've heard the facts, and Hiccup's input on the matter. I say that we finish setting up the island defences as soon as we can. Son-

Stoick's storm steeped gaze met with a sea foam one that was abruptly yanked from the depths of quiet cognition. That colour still stabbed at the last vulnerable place secretly harboured in his chest cavity, and made it ache with an inexplicable sense of loss: A constant whip of Venetian bangs also flicked across his son's now pensive study, driving the nail deeper. Powerful arms sank to rest at the man's thick sides.

A curious mumble rippled throughout the circle.

"Uh, Dad? Everything OK?" The boy's nervous left fingertips drummed over the right knuckles listlessly, as an anxious furrow formed between his brows. He knew that his Father was still upset, and understandably so... But their chief couldn't afford to be compromised right now, not with the sword of invasion dangled so precariously over Berk's collective head. Bleached hands unfolded, and Hiccup brought one to rest on a thick forearm as he tottered forward, a physical means of comfort to accompany the one he mentally prepared to sooth any wayward concerns.

"Don't worry about this: I'm sure that between us, the Dragon academy and Jack, we'll fix this before anyone can get hurt." Low, modulated reassurance, paired with a wry yet resolute curl of his lip. "Mara already bumped me off once, and obviously failed to do that right. So what else can he do to me? We'll beat them dad, you just have to believe in us."

The earnest tone effectually brought the Chief out of his rueful observations, and a slow blink was offered to the deceptively sturdy young man before him. In his father's eyes, Hiccup was no longer the brittle boy he had thought him to be for so long, but had proven himself to be capable and strong in his own right, a worthy warrior despite his age and size. He had befriended a near God of all things, and had brought him to even greater power by convincing the Village of his existence outside of folk tales, much to their now eventual benefit.

His attention flickered briefly to the Winter Spirit in question, who had apparently been scanning Stoick himself. Jokul looked perhaps a touch too arrogant, but it wasn't unfounded given the mighty power he

wielded... But it gave him no excuse to act like such a
pompous...

Their eyes locked for a beat, both ends hard and narrow, but both eventually severed the tense connection and turned away to observe the mutual party that united them.

At last, the humungous man found his voice and finished his sentence with generous orotundity, so it reached every ear in the group.

"Son... whatever you can think of, just let me in and we can get everyone on this, because you've not lead us too far wrong before. I might not know exactly how to deal with this, but I know that if we pull together, we can crush mountains, harness the sea and even make a god fall."

The listeners gave an ear splitting cheer, cementing their loyalty to the cause. The cacophonous sound naturally plastered a grin upon Jack's face, and after receiving a good natured clap on the shoulder from his Father, Hiccup drew back and took the sprite's elbow. This earned a jump of surprise, but his cheeks creased fondly all the same. A secure arm wound around his friend's waist, and he waited patiently for the indication to take off when the other was good and ready.

"We won't let you down, Dad. Finish securing the island's perimeter and we'll come up with a solid strategy when you're done." Seasoned fingers laced and settled against their now frequent home across the strong milky curve of Jack's nape. Hiccup found his weight easily supported by the apparently rapid healer and a nod was all the approval needed for a precise spurt of air to catapult them skyward. Orchestrated by a sharp flick of weathered wood, the pair set into an easy glide across the jagged hem of Berk.

The screen of fog that normally swamped the damp isle at this time of day became partly dispelled in the enduring glare of sun that continued to blaze down upon it. Hiccup had rarely witnessed such weather, and found for the first time in many years that he needed to blink several beads of sweat away under the intense rays. Mindful of the one he clung to, the boy wriggled just a millimetre closer to the balm of Jack's eminently frigid form and sighed as he resisted the compulsion to wipe the salty drops away.

The shift was felt, and a glacial study noted the sweaty brow with a twinge of bemused concern.

"What's the matter Hic, not feeling too hot?" A beat. "-Or perhaps, a little too much so?" The joke was consciously weak, but the kidder drew another lick of wind into their path, as a means to cool the edge of the human's sporadic temperature. Said boy glanced upwards, and offered a watery grimace.

"It's fine, the sun just usually isn't this- Well, it's never this warm, not even during the quarter thaw. I should be asking you that, by the way. Are you sure you're OK carrying me around like this?"

The reply was a diversion at least in part from the issue that had begun to present itself in the slighter body. He had started to feel

uncomfortably hot, fevered even and consequentially sapped a jot more energy from his already meagre reserves. He couldn't get sick, not _now_-

"Naah, perks of being a supernatural freak show: I recover quickly and you're a twig anyhow." Came the cheeky distracting response, brightened with a chuckle. A scarred jaw set itself into an unimpressed jut as slated rooftops soon came into view, and although neither would vocally admit it, the touchdown in glistening snow outside the familiar cabin was a relief to them both.

Not that this needed to be said for Hiccup: Unable to control himself, the overheating youth disentangled himself from one source of cold and sank to his knees to scoop up a mound of powder into quaking palms. Without a flinch, he swiped his glistening face with it, and slid the icy deposits over his neck and traps, groaning in relief.

Salt and pepper brows rose high into the blizzard of Jack's hairline, frivolity flitted away for a moment and he dropped to his haunches to get a better glimpse his friend.

"You're not ok." He stated pointedly, and sucked his teeth in trepidation as to why this mysterious condition had manifested so abruptly. "You're _feverish_."

Waves of relief temporarily blotted Hiccup's outward perception, and as such didn't notice that Jack was crouched at his left until he uttered his concerns. Only then did the thaw slicked hands fall lethargically away and into the snow, as his narrow shoulders eventually gave a weary heave.

"Looks like my body just got wise to the fact that I haven't slept or eaten properly in nearly two days. Plus, I suppose dying once in a while is going to take it's toll on anybody." The laugh that underlined his admittance was flimsy at best as he struggled to get to his feet again. An oak firm palm offered its assistance, and was gratefully accepted by the weakened teenager, who rose shakily from now damp knees. Sympathy presented itself as a low murmur from Jack, who made sure that disparate heels weren't about to give out as he himself unclasped from those positively moist fingers.

"It's probably best that you get your head down for a while." The suggestive quality was actual a thinly veiled order, but it was only born from the unease he felt for his comparatively fragile companion.

"You're only human, after all."

Silence hung between them, despite a buzz of rumbustious activities that had started to unfold and filter up from the town square. Laurel eyes scoped about for a fleeting second as they tried to read the elder's tight expression, Hiccup's own features scored here and there with pensive grooves.

"I can't... there's too much to do." Came the dry counter, and he turned to head down slippery steps towards Gobber's forge, (where the Smith was apparently working, it his deduction could be judged by the smoke spiralling from a cobbled chimney). This wasn't to be tolerated by his companion, however, and a steely clasp encased Hiccup's bony

wrist in order to halt the boy in his tracks. A silent retort was thrown over a shoulder, flattening thick brows into a quizzical line.

"You need to _rest,_" Jack stressed, his answer to an unspoken query. "Or frankly, you won't be any use at all. If you try and build something or write up plans for other people to follow, chances are that you'll make mistakes and then _everyone_ will be in danger."

Everything that Jack laid out so plainly to Hiccup was blatantly true, but it didn't mean that the exhausted teenager had to like it. Scrunching his nose, he opened his mouth to voice his worries, but a chalky hand raised to stay the complaints.

"Just take it easy for two hours. It's only noon, and Pitch won't try anything until sunset at least. Get something to eat and have a nap, or whatever it takes to get your strength back, but we need you working at near enough your full capacity, for all our sakes."

It was a request, but Hiccup could only read it as a softly delivered demand from a powerful immortal to sleep. Treating the 'order' like a huge inconvenience and suppressing the urge to grumble at his well intentioned 'Guardian', he conceded and wrangled his wrist away to pivot and ascend the perilous steps.

Frustration funnelled through the boy's bulbous nose as the cabin's latch was lifted, and sunlight cut a golden swathe through a shady interior.

**XXX**

On an enormous, volcanic slab, a leathery beast began to stir from its slumber: grogginess punctuated the rumble that flared the slits of curved nostrils, and dewy, luminous eyes gradually cracked open at the sound of a familiar voice. Toothless' limbs were still heavy with the soothing draft that the friendly female human had fed to him a few hours previously, but the dragon was nothing if not a sturdy creature.

Awareness of surroundings was something that had yet to come back to Toothless: disorientation informed his senses and addled his hearing with a sensation that was similar to having one's head submerged in water. Long, scaly ears flickered a few times, and the ends of sentences were caught. They made little sense to the listener, but the emotion present was something he picked up on, as if scented colours were tingeing the air with each vocal shift.

Conversation batted back and forth between two people, surely his master and the cold one. On the fringes of the creature's perception, it could be deduced that the human was exhausted, and quietly irate. The other's speech was soft, perhaps a touch concerned for the one he tried to calm. It was hushed bickering at best, their voices subdued possibly for the dragon's sake, unnecessary but considerate all the same.

A prickle spurred oily black hackles to attention. It was an implacable agitation, but the haze that fuddled Toothless' mind receded, replaced by a sense of primal wariness crept in to fill the gap.

There was quiet for a few stuttering beats - then a clatter and a tumult of yells shattered the silence like a stone slung through a pane of glass. A ghastly yet guttural wail that spoke directly to the Night Fury splayed his scale dashed ears, and he immediately scrambled to his feet. Bolts of ice sparked and crackled against the wooden slats, narrowly missing the dragon as he launched himself off the mezzanine and skittered over his favourite rafter in an effort to get to Hiccup's side. Dizziness washed over the unfortunate creature, a result of clambering to his feet so quickly after prolonged sedation, but at the last moment his claws clamped into the beam and he took aim at the living shadow that loomed over the boys. The scrape and screeching roar drew Hiccup's attention, who had time to scream at Jack to get down as gas gathered between suddenly lethal jaws. It ignited: Violet flames blew half of the dwelling's west wall and the intruder away through it with one formidable, blistering blast.

* * *

><p>I DIDN'T FORGET ABOUT THIS I PROMISE. I just had a lot of personal things to contend with in the horrendously long gap.</p></p>

**Questions, comments and reviews are always welcome.**

_**Thanks so much for reading! Your patience must be inhuman.
'D**_

25. Chapter 25: Leniency

**(AN: HAVE A MEGA ULTRA MONDO UPDATE. Thank you so much for your patience. A fair bit going on here that wouldn't do in two piece, hence the length.**

**Also, 'Hel' is not a typo. It's the Viking Hell for the dishonorable dead. ~.**

**ON WITH THE STORY-)**

* * *

><p>Quarrels were common among friends and lovers alike, this much Hiccup knew.<p>

In personal experience, he had only a few of the first, much less the second, so the Viking was still unused to not outright arguing his point to the intended party with no punches held. Softer squabbles with ones he held dear without the tie of blood required more tact and heed towards the other's feelings: Astrid was not one for mincing her words, and nor were any of the other riders. Not that there was a need to spare them, since he had known the brusque crew since childhood.

Outsiders rarely remained for more than a few hours, and were barely inclined to become acquainted with Hiccup, so when it came to hard words with Jack, it was uncertain and articulation became difficult, especially with the addition of exhaustion.

In short, the human became a grouch. Whether it resulted from fatigue, the many frustrations with his current situation, or even just the infernal temperature that spewed from his pores, Hiccup was not equipped as a young human being to deal with so many corners of stress at once. He did what any teenage boy would do when things got too heavy and simply got annoyed at everything.

"Seriously though, I sometimes forget that mortals need to do these things, you know? Can't _remember_ the last time I _needed_ to sleep."

"_Uh huh_."

'Everything' seemed to also include the constant prattle 'f concern that Jack seemed to be reeling out non stop.

Temper flaring in his gut, Hiccup was ready to spin on his heel and tell his companion to kindly _give it a rest_, when something caught the corner of his pale, itching eye.

"Well, if you don't include_ passing out_-"

"...?"

Shadows were prone to playing tricks on the lad when he found himself on the brink of physical collapse, often flickering in the corners of his weary vision when it was time to finally retreat into the welcoming tangle of blankets.

This was not one of those times, instinct told him as a delicate palm raised itself briskly with a halting motion in Jack's yammering direction. The shadow had been too quick, deliberate, and sported a rather unique profile, complete with jagged points and an impressive nose. Torrid blood froze in constricted veins as vines of black spread along worn wooden beams.

By this time, Jack had also cottoned on to the swirling darkness that silently crept against each rough slat. He paled -if it was possible- and whirled on his heel. Two pairs of eyes grew impossibly wide as a malicious inky spill grouped itself into a recognizable shape: It solidified, and the Nightmare king practically peeled himself away from the wall, an awful smile gleaming out from the black veil that receded from his terrible face.

"Hello, Boys.~"

"Pitch!" Jack cried, his own teeth bared as he readied his stance and brandished his crook. Sparks crackled along its surface, his face under-lit in a blue wash that only seemed to highlight his dread.

Hiccup, on the other hand, was not armed apart from the tiny dagger in his waistband, but that hardly counted. Although it was a near Herculean effort to prise his petrified face away, he scanned familiar walls and furniture for some sort of a weapon. Despite their abundance, there were none in immediate reach, aside from a basic wooden shield to his left.

A bolt of ice crashed into the wall where Jack had been aiming for Pitch's head, but the shadow coiled and dodged the attack with a

smirk.

"What is it with teenage boys-" He remarked as a casual inky whip was flung in the Sprite's direction.

"-And refusing to stay dead these days?"

The lash connected with Jack's side despite his agility, earning a cry of pain as Hiccup dove and rolled with a surprisingly nimble action himself. Snatching up the shield, he hooked it over his left arm, managed to get to his feet without too much scrambling and raised his meagre defence. Only, distraction yanked the boy's attention near instantly: His head wrenched around in alarm as Jack slammed into a wall with a crunch.

"Now now, where's that Viking Hospitality, hm?" Came the sly chime from a clearly unworried Pitch.

"Jack!"

Through his yell, Hiccup was deaf to the shade's comment as another inky tendril of sand knocked him off his feet. Luckily, it was caught in his peripheral just in time and the shield deflected its brunt, but all air still vacated the human's lungs as he crashed to the floor.

Already in the process of recovery, determination and rage scored livid creases into Jack's normally fair features. An adrenalin sharpened gaze flicked to his left where his frail friend rag dolled, but without the presence of blood the young man couldn't spare any focus in the face of the Nightmare King, or they would both suffer.

As if the roar that was simultaneously loosed aided its charge, the beaten crook sizzled with power and groaned as the aged wood strained to contain the attack. It didn't have to: Air screeched as the sprite leapt, spun the weapon and bore down on his target with an overhead strike.

Golden eyes hooded in blatant amusement and his arm raised, encased in a gauntlet of oscillating darkness to absorb the blow, when a heavy clambering overhead captured the attention of both combatants.

Momentum dissipated and the Sprite experienced a brief moment of hang time while both he and the shade witnessed a Night Fury gargle an ominous ball of Violet flame.

With a grunt, the downed Human rolled and shrugged off his shield so he could shakily brace on his elbows, but he managed to lift his head just in time to absorb the scene with skewed vision.

Bare feet touched down to splintered floorboards, and a support beam creaked under Toothless' weight. Even Pitch seemed to halt with a dent of confusion between his brows.

The blast would hit them both at that range.

"Get down!"

Thought barely entered the equation of Hiccup's next move as it all

merged into a blur: Urgency allowed him to burst forward just enough snag a thin ankle and yank, much to the surprise of Jack, who had been transfixed on the Night Fury. Startled, he had a split second to recognise what snared him before the pull brought him crashing to his front.

Jack's strong chin collided with a markedly sturdier surface and pearly teeth clacked together in a cringe worthy fashion as the protective (and possibly territorial) dragon above spat a flame so hot that it scorched silvery licks of hair as it passed.

Pitch finally cottoned on to exactly what he was in for, but far too late for even him to dodge as the searing ball of light collided with his chest... And the majority of his form for that matter. The Nightmare king hurtled through the cabin's wall in a blaze that enveloped him for a few moments before he extinguished the fire with a cyclone of black sand.

Meanwhile, debris and splinters scattered over the pair's heads as Toothless sprang from his rafter in pursuit of the trespasser to his master's home. As he did however (and through no direct fault of his own) the beam creaked and a fragile fissure already present there buckled with the push of his powerful haunches.

Both Jack and Hiccup gasped and struggled to sit, but naturally the elder regained his bearing more quickly, just in time to see the rafter fall away completely over his friend's quaking head.

If he had liquid blood, it would have solidified then, but his reflexes were automatic. He lunged at the oblivious human and captured him in a protective embrace. Jack huddled Hiccup close and flourished his crook with the finesse of an exaggerated paint stroke, drawing an arc of ice above them to protect against a cascade of debris that followed. The loss of support compromised the cabin's structure, and the roof fell in on them.

The arc expanded instinctively at Jack's subconscious command, and both were encased under an ever thickening shell of ice as more and more weight piled on top of it. Nails, slates and planks continued to crash and blot out any light.

Both cold and nerves shook Hiccup's limbs as the clatters overhead refused to stop for what seemed like an age, but when they did, the boys were left in a chilly, close darkness. Tense fingers remained clawed in Jack's shirt for a spell, and an equally strong palm clutched Hiccup's skinny shoulder as it jerked with each impact. Breath reverberated shortly against their shield's walls, and when the groaning above eventually stopped, it took a second or two for one of them to speak.

A swallow bobbed Jack's apple while he waited, and although unseen by his companion, a smile glinted even in the blackness.

"I'll be honest with you..." He breathed, though his quiet words were edged with the brightness of his grin.

"...I had no idea that would work."

This comment earned a sharp jab to Jack's skinny side from the boy who still hadn't raised his head.

Soon enough however, Hiccup managed to lift his eyes and bore into the dark space where he thought the other's face might be with a glare so fierce that if it had carried heat it could have threatened the integrity of the ice dome.

Outside the wreckage, things weren't quite so idyllic. Pitch's rush of sand had not deterred the Night Fury in his wake, and by now every Viking that remained in the village had their attention stolen by the practical explosion that had eradicated chief Stoick's home. They thundered up the hill, but Astrid tore on her swiftest legs to the group's front (despite many yells of protest), executing a series of ducks and weaves with Stormfly in airborne tow to check on the commotion. Pale eyes narrowed as they tried to pick out details at a distance.

"What on Freya's green Earth-?"

Axe already in her hand, its blade flashed as the girl adjusted her grip, only to screech to a halt at the sight that greeted her. Toothless was engaged with what looked like a man made of living ink, currently in the process of glaring his opponent down and stalking around him in a tight circle of predatory intent. Without warning, fiery jaws parted and spewed flame that deafened unprepared onlookers with its characteristic shriek, but it seemed that Toothless' assailant was ready, and a graceful sweep of a willowy arm seemed to be all he needed to raise a wall of-

Sand?

Yes, that's what it seemed to be, she could see from the way particles scattered and she knew it would have stung her eyes if she hadn't covered them. However, the others had not been so quick and the wash of sand incurred a rash of Vikings all rubbing at their faces. Blinking a few times to make sure there was none in her lashes, the shield maiden tried to make sense of what the hell was going on, when her focus shifted and flicked briefly to the ruins of Stoick's cabin...Hiccup had _been_ in there.

For a reason she couldn't explain, her heart thudded, and she dashed around the confrontation, skidded on her knees and proceeded to wrench pieces of wood away from the wreckage. As a side thought, Astrid turned briskly and blurred a series of hand signals to her flying companion, who obediently landed at Toothless' side to aid him.

Stormfly set down lightly, and hopped around to the strange figure's right. A flame like a blow torch was jetted in his direction, only for another swathe of sand to block it. It seemed that whenever these lashes met a blast, they solidified under their heat and crystallised into violent glistening spires. The reptiles did not care for this and instead both pounced from opposite ends to try and flatten their target with brute force: unbeknownst to them, this tactic could only end badly.

It had started with agitation, but the effects of the Nightmare King's Sand had evolved into full on panic soon enough amongst the group of gathered Vikings. Late comers to the scene witnessed in disbelief when their comrades began to flail and yell as any movement riled their senses and brought their terror to an insidious fever

pitch: As equally meaty bodies sprinted towards them in a practical wall of muscle, these poor souls occasionally had to knock their friends out with a well meant pop to the face. So distracted by the troubles that immediately met them literally head on in some cases, most didn't even acknowledge the surreal battle that occurred on the mount, and those who did could only stare in awe as they dragged any dead weight out from under the trample of friendly boots.

"Jeez Hic, that stung!" Grunted Jack, even though a tinge of his smirk remained. The said boy was honestly in no kind of mood for nonsense any more.

"We need to get out of here, now." Hiccup didn't raise his voice, there was no need. It carried in the contained space, and his tone also held enough weight to put his urgency across as bluntly as a blow to the head.

Humour eventually faded from the edge of pale lips, and the immortal nodded once, just a little dejected: It seemed that at last, playtime was finally over.

"Alright..." He replied, and wondered how exactly they were actually going to get out. For a long, awkward moment, only the sound of their breath could be heard while Jack thought. The Spirit's own was steady, but each was long and mostly out of habit than need. His companion's however was tremulous and uneven as it tickled his chin. The boy's fist still hadn't unclenched from his shirt, and with their proximity Jack could feel the rapid beat and occasional blip in Hiccup's lively pulse, since his own body barely made a sound.

He was in a state of silent panic, and being in a dark, enclosed space with rapidly depleting oxygen probably wasn't aiding matters by any stretch. But Thor smite him if Hiccup didn't hide his condition well.

A few icy star bursts issued glassy tinkles as they shattered and provided some light in the space when Jack summoned them from his crook: their illumination made his eyes blaze blue as they flicked about, analysing the structure until a solution was reached.

The restricted room made it difficult, but every muscle prepared to pull back in the young man's arm as he tightened his grip around the wooden shaft, ready to strike, when he halted.

Hiccup blinked in the sporadic light, and glanced up at Jack quizzically as confusion set his brows off kilter.

"Uh, something wrong? Not wanting to _rush _you but-"

A rumble could be felt through the ground beneath them, and that tell tale pulse hastened the words that came next.

"-I think we might be needed out there, so-"

"It doesn't make sense." Interrupted Jack, still motionless and obviously lost in thought. Hiccup let a hush hang as a prompt for his strangely subdued friend to continue. The silvery head shook minutely, and cracked lips formed into a line of tension.

"Pitch shouldn't be able to move around during the day. We were

banking on the fact that he couldn't... And I only thought what I heard was a _rumour..._"

Another shift and tremor beneath them silenced Jack abruptly, and Hiccup decided that his pragmatism should outweigh compulsive curiosity for just this once. A chill ran down his spine as compromised ice creaked above, obviously unable to support the remains of his home much longer.

"Can you get us out? Because, that would be a really _fantastic_ idea."

Before he could waffle on further, a frigid palm splayed and lodged itself against the back of the Human's head, pushing his face down into Jack's shoulder as a shield for what was to come.

"Take a deep breath."

A murmur before a maelstrom: tomb stone teeth clenched together as the Spirit felt his friend's chest swell and a growl of effort rumbled in his own. Pressure built within the dome, whipped and tore at Hiccup's ears and hair, but decisive strikes were launched with that deceptively sturdy crook against the barrier's top.

Once.

Twice.

Boom!

Ice and wood jettisoned high into the air in a column of concentrated wind. The vacuum dispersed, and at last Hiccup could breathe, only to devolve into a coughing fit as dust was inhaled and Jack helped him to his feet.

As she flung herself away from an unexpected shower of debris of scattered wood and ice crystals, Astrid spotted two figures as they clambered out of the haze. Sure toes rapidly picked through the wreckage as the girl reached out to grab a spindly wrist and pluck her friend out of the dust. Reassurance washed over her like a warm, white wave.

Blinking the murk from his lashes, Hiccup regarded what he thought was a Valkyrie for a split second through watery eyes until they cleared, and a very relieved set of cornflower blues met his. The corners of his mouth automatically pricked up in return.

"_Astrid-_"

"Hiccup! What's going on? There's a _thing _that's-!"

Stormfly was tossed, sailing right over the trio, but the beast's agile nature came into play, and she corrected her trajectory, saving herself a collision with the cabin's remaining wall.

Astrid's eyes widened as the Nadder gave a roar, and readied her tail. Jack cocked his head in confusion, only for the girl to grasp that snowy crown and shove both his and Hiccup's down as a volley of

spikes whistled past, only to miss Jack's spikes by a hair's breadth.

"Hiccup, what is that _thing_? Everyone has gone crazy-!"

The Shadow span and batted Toothless away with his sandy vortex, a snarl finally shattering the unperturbed visage he'd sported until that point. He repelled the Night Fury's pounce, only to be lodged with several vibrant yellow projectiles that impaled in his stomach, shoulder and, rather gruesomely, skimmed his cheek. So concerned was Hiccup by the unruly arc his friend was sent into, he missed the dart that tore at Pitch's skin, which brought a large portion away like a poorly peeled grape.

A howl of rage neither animal nor man was loosed from the Nightmare King, and all at once the youths felt their nerves become brittle with fright. They rose from their crouch and Jack took lead as he sprang over loose ground deftly, Astrid and Hiccup close in tow. Stormfly bounded over to regroup with her dazed companion, who aside from a mild knock to the noggin seemed to be unharmed and got to his feet with no problem. Hiccup followed her progress, and a visible sigh of relief rounded his shoulders. It was short lived as he faced forward yet again to the main threat at hand.

The sprite looked to the clouds, and the pallid sun they obscured... It had been so bright earlier, and he internally cursed its awful punctuality, for when could a soul require _her_ presence more than in this instant?

Distraction was not a luxury any of them had right now though, especially when the smallest of their number had no weapon, not an ideal situation by any means... Well, aside from the tiny knife now held in scuffed, trembling knuckles.

With her usual professionalism, Astrid widened her stance and narrowed her gaze at the God she now recognised as Mara... Or 'Pitch' from Hiccup's account. She studied him as he drew up to his impossible height, the cyclone of tendrils concentrated now to his right, where the light would have bore down on him. This did not spare the teenagers a glimpse of Pitch's face, however.

Ghastly was probably appropriate, if its potency could be increased by ten. The heat from Toothless' blast had mostly been absorbed by the odd shadow garments he donned, wrapped around Pitch's limbs and torso like a second skin, but evidence remained of the blast in sickly patches of charred flesh at his collar and wrists. This was small change in comparison to the damage wrought by Stormfly's dart: It became clear that skin Pitch wore had not always been his own, and Jack visibly stumbled back in morbid surprise as this revelation hit him first in a nearly palpable blow.

That gasp of absolute terror caught Hiccup's attention immediately, and he allowed his eyes to travel over to Jack, whose complexion very much reflected the ghost he was.

"What's wrong?" The boy enquired urgently in a hushed tone, diverting his gaze back to the shimmering shape before them-

-And then _he_ saw it.

The tear showed not only the grey face beneath, but an ominous brown smeared in places against it that Hiccup recognised as dried blood. Skin that was stretched far too tight over the God's imposing form had succumbed to holes and rot, its ashen colour actually that of the recently deceased. Any and all courage he'd summoned dropped into the pit of his stomach, and sent a roll of nausea back up with its impact.

"Goodness, look at what you've done to my new suit," Tutted the Nightmare king, casually unfolding the flap of skin that had peeled away from his cheek and eye socket. It was reset after a gentle squelch, and even Astrid winced, her own face devoid of any pink.

"It would seem that with you two around, it will impossible for me to maintain any nice things, eh?" He remarked, at ease for now behind his barrier of sand, and another man's stolen flesh.

At last, Jack found his tongue and wrapped it around a coherent sentence.

"Pitch... What have you done?" He breathed, voice quivering with both anger and a noxious little drop of fear. The answer was obvious, but Jack was still in shock that the Nightmare King had actually pulled such a heinous act.

Hiccup saw the crook's tip lower, its owner obviously weakened by the horrific sight before him, so with each foot like a block of lead, he brought himself forward to stand at his friend's side, raised his knife and set his glare to full heat as his blade shone just a little brighter in the strengthening sunlight.

"Stay back-" Jack pleaded when he realised Hiccup had drawn up even with him, but his panic was only met with a warm, determined curve of the mouth.

Out of their peripheral vision, they could also see Astrid take a few cautious steps, and thanked Odin that she was someone that regarded them as both friends and allies.

"... You've sheathed yourself in a person," Concluded Hiccup as his expression grew positively stormy. As if just noticing his presence for the first time since they'd gotten outside, Pitch cocked his head at the tiny Viking, and glided forward a few 'steps'. The Blade's point punctuated the space before Hiccup with a stab, and the Shadow halted, but not out of any sense of self preservation... No. His golden eyes creased with Mirth, the gathering of fallow skin around them pulling his lips into a particularly foul smile.

A spidery hand smoothed back a crest of raven hair, and the man /folded/ himself at the waist to speak to the boy on his level. All three youths jumped, but Hiccup swiftly recovered strong in his stance.

They stared at each other, aquiline nose directly across from a round, freckled one, and Jack did not dare move in case Pitch tried something first.

"Aren't you the brave little warrior now," The man finally cooed, but made now move, other than to widen that awful grin. "You must

have acquired a sliver of that Stubbornness you Nords are so damned proud of at last. Such a pity."

The knife's point was mere inches from Pitch's throat, Hiccup noticed. His pulse shuddered at the thought of ending everything so simply, that one jab could eradicate their problems right there and then, and his lids flickered as his grip tightened. Fear was a strong motivator after all.

Jack saw the minute contraction in his friend's arm, preparation for a strike, and he felt the need to cry out, but for a reason he could not name. Before any sound could leave him though, Pitch wrapped an unnaturally long fingers around the boy and raised him from the ground so suddenly that a jolt of surprise disarmed Hiccup and prised his dagger from shock slackened fingers. Jack vaulted forward and swung with every spark he could muster as Astrid followed immediately afterwards with a practised but deadly twirl of her axe. They both struck with blows that should have driven into the Shadow's side, but the inky substance melted Astrid's blade upon contact. She staggered back with a shout and blew on her hands as the wood seemed to burn like acid against her palms right before she could let go. Jack's luck wasn't much better, as his icy slash missed, faltered when he feared it might hit Hiccup: Pitch snatched at this advantage, along with the young man's waist. A tentacle snagged around Jack's middle and launched him back into the girl who was in the throes of psychosomatic blistering upon her palms. They went down and tumbled into a thankfully intact bank of snow, but were too overcome with disorientation to rise for the moment.

With a sniff, Pitch turned back to the struggling boy in his grasp and shook his head in admonishment, lips puckered in mock disapproval.

"Hiccup, Hiccup : I thought you were meant to be intelligent. Honestly, is that any way to go about trying to slay a God?"

All around, shouts of terror filled the air, panic thick and roiling with a taste of sweat and metal. The Nightmare king drank it in like a revitalising tonic, granting him just an extra ounce of fortitude against the sun that was consistently threatening to peek through the dense layer of overcast clouds. Time was shorter than even he could anticipate, but the shadow's attention was diverted just a fraction longer as he looked closely at the writhing child in his grasp.

"Besides, it would seem that the divine has tarred you with their misguided brush as well." The comment was conversational as a clammy forefinger and thumb held Hiccup's jaw in a vice. Sea foam eyes gleamed at his captor in rage as he grew progressively more weary with being lofted from the ground without permission and thundered back as well as he could.

" What are you talking about?!"

The way Pitch cocked his head in interest was near avian in its sharpness: his pyrite study devoured his prisoner's vibrant rose gold hair and milky skin, made note of each stark dot of pigment and the heat he could absorb through his spindly fingers around Hiccup's torso as it heaved against the cage they formed. A smirk was all the answer that the boy was offered before Jack came flying at them,

screaming in rage. So caught up in his scrutiny was he, Pitch had actually forgotten about the little ghost and warrior maiden he'd flung aside. Surprise had actually managed to flank the God as a surely aimed bolt of blue lightning crackled against his shoulder and dislodged the little captive from his grasp.

Dropped without warning, Hiccup crumpled to the ground like a loosely wrapped bundle of twigs, but recovered quickly as Astrid hauled him quickly to stand. Her lips were thinned by well concealed pain as she hefted back her arm to throw one of the smaller hatchets taken from her hip. A grunt evolved into a yell of effort as Hiccup ducked clear of the axe that whizzed past expertly with a flick of her wrist.

Jack, who had banished Pitch's sand barrier with his unforeseen attack, had heard the whistle of metal before he saw it. Still carried by the momentum of his assault, he gripped Pitch's shoulder, twisted out of the path of blindly thrashing tentacles and brought in his knees to reverse somersault away. The push of his legs in turn inched Pitch towards the whirling silver edge that Astrid had thrown, and as it lodged itself in the God's opposing shoulder, the boys couldn't help but wince at the sickly sound it made, like a cleaver sinking into a lamb's leg.

There was no blood however, and as the trio briskly regrouped, Pitch couldn't help but stumble back.

With a _smile_.

As if the axe in his joint was a splinter in his toe, the Nightmare king yanked it from himself. It was dropped to the ground as a child would when he had grown bored of his friend's toys, but only tainted enjoyment painted that hideous flaking face of his. His eyes wandered back over to Jack then, a decayed brow raised in interest as if he had only just noticed the return of blizzard locks and cerulean eyes.

"And now this 'bleaching' has formed a _trend_. Tell me jack, did you not like the fresh look? I suppose after three hundred years, a boy can be set in his choices-"

"_Hiccup_ fixed him!" Spat Astrid through gritted teeth, her fingers throbbing in agony as she curled them around another axe and poised to attack. "Whatever you do, we'll find a way to fix it, you sack of slime!"

Pitch, however, barely seemed to heed the girl's words, apart from the mention of his tiny Viking _victim_ reversing Jack's transformation. Sunlight flashed threateningly through the once again evaporating cloud bank, and the God knew his time was nearly over.

Barely audible over distant shouts of panic, Pitch narrowed his eyes at Hiccup, all humour fleeting from them like a hare from a fox pack.

"...I see. That would explain a lot, actually. You _stink_ of _her_._" He pondered aloud, those golden pin pricks very leaving their mark. The subject of his scrutiny only grew frustrated.

"What are you _talking_ about? I smell like _who?_" He cried, although his knees felt weak. Jack leant over to grasp an elbow, steeling his little friend's stance. The intonation of Pitch's words lead the sprite to slot disjointed pieces of information together into a theory he could articulate. A piercing glare was shot in the shadow's direction.

"...Then you know that you've bitten off more than you can chew, Pitch." He stated simply, conviction rooting his deep tone.

For a moment, Pitch said nothing, and then his awful lips lifted once more.

"...Granted, I have underestimated you two." He purred, his shadows retreating to wrap more tightly around him as armour. "But I would have been disappointed if this battle ended prematurely, if I am to be perfectly frank. This is the most fun I've had in aeons, and now I don't wish it to end. I'll tell you what-"

One finger extended skyward as an illustration.

"I will grant you one day's rest, and come sunset tomorrow, we will settle the bid for this land once and for all. That way, we can dual at full strength, and have ourselves a grand old time. A fair condition, is it not?"

Before either boy could answer, smoky tendrils swaddled Pitch's form in protective bandages of shadow and two enormous wings sprouted from his back, a form borrowed from the night fury (much to Hiccup's quiet indignation).

"I look forward to seeing all you have launch at me... And _breaking it all apart._"

With a scream of wind, wings harshly beat once and launched the Nightmare king into the air, an acidic cacophony of laughter riding his wake that would haunt all present for the night to come. With his departure towards the sea and from the realm of sight, the wails of the Vikings devolved into pathetic moans, and then eventually exhausted silence.

At last, light broke through and bathed the island in a warmth that Hiccup didn't realise he needed so much. He and Jack exchanged a one sided pair of looks that spoke volumes of the Sprite's withheld knowledge.

Astrid, feeling that the danger had subsided for now, dropped her axe into the snow and glanced down at her raw, trembling fingers. Her friend noticed this, and abstaining from questions for the moment, Hiccup coaxed his elbow from Jack's grip to inspect the girl's damaged hands.

"Oh Gods, Astrid... Let's take a look-"

He attempted to gently take the fingers into his own, but Astrid yelped in pain and surprise, batting him away.

" OW! No- _No-_ You're skin's like _fire_!" She screamed, clutching her fist in the other, only to half sob again at the raw contact it afforded. Hiccup staggered backwards in alarm, only for Jack to step

in front of him and automatically take Astrid's hands into the soothing fold of his cold ones.

"Calm down... Come on, Astrid, you're fine, you're _tough_..."

Although she flinched at first, soon enough she sighed in relief, and felt the blisters gradually sink. A small smirk curled her lip, watery eyes lidded in amusement.

"Tougher than you'll ever be, twinkle toes.~"

The mirth was mirrored as Jack grinned back broadly.

"Don't doubt that for a second, pig knuckles."

After a moment though, the pair's attention shifted to their shaken little friend, who was now looking at his freckled knuckles as if they were cobras. His focus lifted, rife with worry as both the Sprite and the shield maiden regarded their mysteriously afflicted friend with concern. Dread coiled into a hefty. Nauseous bundle in Hiccup's chest cavity.

"...Just what in Hel is _going on_ with me?"

* * *

><p>It should be noted that the alternative title was "In which Jack's hair is constantly under threat."**

As ever, thank you for reading!

Any questions, feedback or anything else, don't hesitate to message me or leave a review.~

As an answer to 'Jessie' (I couldn't reply to your review for some reason), this is a friendship fic. From what I gather though, Vikings didn't mind touching each other all that much. These guys are honestly just very fast friends. From what I know of the coming plot, I don't**_ think_****_ that will change. Sorry if that spoils anything for anyone? : 'D_**

Thanks Again,

QG/ Bubbles.~

End
file.